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QMMR Qualitative & Multi-Method Research

Fall 2025 | Volume 23.2

Table of Contents

QMMR Qualitative & Multi-Method Research

Fall 2025 | Volume 23.2

Notes from the Field

Notes from the Classroom

QMMR Qualitative & Multi-Method Research

Letter from the Section President

Qualitative and Multi-Method Research Fall 2025, Volume 23.2 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17671810

As I begin my two-year term as Section president (September 2025 – September 2027), I wish to invoke the words of my immediate predecessor, Jennifer Cyr, writing in these very pages two years ago. "I want to start this brief letter by extending a heartfelt thanks to all of you - our qualitative and multi-method membership - for your stalwart commitment to the rigorous application of qualitative and mixed methods in the discipline. I believe our work is needed now more than ever."

Jen was an amazing Section president, and her words were, as always, prescient and correct. Thanks to Jen and the Executive Committee with which she worked – all building upon the efforts of Alan Jacobs, president before Jen – our Section has become an international, diverse community of scholars committed to plural and rigorous teaching about and research on a broad array of qualitative methods. The latter range from the critical realist / neo-positivist (Bayesian qualitative reasoning, set-theoretic methods, comparative historical analysis), to the feminist (ethics of care), to the interpretive (digital/visual ethnography), to the critical and participatory (post-colonial/relational ethics, photo elicitation).

This pluralism and diversity are the Section's strengths – and I will work with all of you to maintain and deepen them. The Section supports your teaching and research on qualitative and mixed methods in various ways, from the six awards given on an annual basis (details here), to the methods short courses we create and sponsor on the day before the APSA annual convention (2025 short courses listed here), to our flagship publication, *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (QMMR)*.

Letter from the President

On *QMMR*, its continuing excellence and likely future both deserve a few words. On the former, the Section owes a huge debt of gratitude to its current editors - Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos (Oxford University) and Juan Masullo (University of Milan and Leiden University) – whose four-year term editing the publication finishes with this issue. Thank you, Ezequiel and Juan! *QMMR* has thrived under their leadership, publishing a wide array of cutting-edge qualitative research that reflects the Section's diversity and pluralism; adding new rubrics (Notes from the Field; Notes from the Classroom); expanding the use of double-blind peer review; and creating a user-friendly, informative web site.

Regarding the future of *QMMR*, it is time for it to transition from a section publication to an indexed, peer-reviewed journal. Indeed, if I have a priority and agenda for my two-year presidency, it is to turn this possibility into a reality. Long-time Section members will recall that we have been having discussions about this newsletter-to-journal transition for quite a while; now, we have an action plan for making it happen. By early 2026, the Section's Executive Committee will have recruited and established a special 'Journal Committee.' Its job will be twofold: collecting data that makes the case why APSA / political science needs such a journal; and then preparing the formal application. Creating the journal will be a two-step process. First, APSA – its Publications Committee, the APSA Council – must approve our application and recommend it to Cambridge University Press, as a new Section-run, but APSA-sponsored journal. Second, we will need to make a formal application to Cambridge.

Preliminary discussions with both APSA and Cambridge have been very encouraging, but have also highlighted a key issue – money, or what APSA likes to call 'Financial feasibility (proposed cost).' The latter is all the more challenging if we propose, to Cambridge, an open-access model. For both ethical and diversity reasons, I think such a model should be our default – but it further complicates the money question.

To end on a positive note, I am optimistic that we will succeed with the application, at both stages. *QMMR* has reached a point, with the breadth and quality of its publications, that such an application is feasible. Now, the Section needs to commit the personnel – the Journal Committee - and find the resources to make it happen. I'm on it and will keep you posted!

Jeffrey T. Checkel
European University Institute

QMMR Qualitative & Multi-Method Research

Letter from the Editors

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This is our last issue as editors. It has been a privilege to share the responsibility of steering our beloved publication over the past four years.

QMMR plays a vital role in APSA's qualitative and multi-methods community. In addition to providing a space for cutting-edge thinking on research design and implementation, it promotes collegial exchanges through thematic symposia and book fora. We are proud to have opened our pages to new voices, including teachers of qualitative methods, practitioners, and early-career methodologists. This was possible thanks to the addition of two sections—*Notes from the Classroom* and *Notes from the Field*—as well as the annual publication of a dossier featuring contributions from colleagues who take part in Diana Kapiszewski and Hillel Soifer's *Emerging Methodologists Workshop* (now led by Jennifer Bussell and Hillel Soifer).

QMMR has seen a sharp increase in submissions from graduate students and faculty at all career stages and from multiple world regions. They are based in diverse institutions and represent a wide range of epistemological traditions. When it comes to original articles, over the past four years we shifted from a model in which we actively sought promising contributions to one where we now regularly, and gladly, receive spontaneous submissions. We are growing as a diverse and vibrant community, and we are proud to have been part of this journey.

Due to this collective growth, the current issue is particularly rich. It features three original articles. Gary Goertz discusses the differences between taking a "vs" and an "or" approach when assessing the merits of different explanations for an outcome. Tomáš Došek proposes an integrated framework to think systematically about scope conditions in subnational comparative research. Javier Pérez Sandoval, in turn, explores the affinities and synergies between subnational and multi-method research designs.

In our Notes section, Simone Cremaschi discusses the challenges and rewards of building trust in the field. To do so, he draws on his ethnographic experience in informal labor camps in southern Italy—known as *ghetti* among the West African migrants who live there. Egor Lazarev, Daniel Mattingly, and Elisabeth Jean Wood reflect on almost twenty years of teaching the graduate-level Qualitative Field Research course at Yale University, one of the few U.S.-based PhD programs with an examination field in Qualitative and Archival Methods.

Finally, as is now the case in every Fall issue, the Emerging Methodologists Workshop symposium offers a window into how a new generation of graduate students and early career scholars are pushing the boundaries of qualitative and mixed-methods research. For example, contributors write about how to manage subjectivity and uncertainty in dataset construction, new survey formats, and innovative network-based approaches to interview sampling.

Together with QMMR's former president, Jennifer Cyr, a significant part of our time as editors was devoted to working towards transitioning from a "publication" to an indexed journal. This required taking important steps, which included discussing this long-standing aspiration with QMMR members and the executive committee, as well as liaising with the APSA team and Cambridge University Press. With the support of excellent research

assistants (a particular shout-out to Lara Hankeln), we collected data that demonstrates the need for a journal where political scientists from different traditions can advance methodological innovations in qualitative and mixed-methods research. Given the active and engaged community that we are, we believe we have a strong case for the creation of such a journal. We are excited to have contributed to this process and look forward to supporting the incoming editorial team when they assume responsibility for this task.

As we turn the page, we want to thank everyone who helped us carry out our duties. Special thanks go to our diligent reviewers; Sebastian Kacher and Jennifer Cyr, who were always there to guide us through the complexities of the editorial process; Anna Calasanti (our copyeditor); Toni Aronica (our previous typesetter); and Valeria Goldsztein (our new typesetter and designer). They all did excellent work.

Last but by no means least, let us introduce the next editorial team: Jeff Checkel (European University Institute), Sam Ritholtz (University of Oxford) and Lisa Wedeen (University of Chicago). We have no doubt that the publication is in excellent hands and we wish them all the best.

We sign off with our usual call for original articles and symposia. Readers can find details about QMMR's submission guidelines on our website: https://www.qmmrpublication.com.

Until next time,

Ezequiel González-Ocantos, University of Oxford
Juan Masullo, University of Milan and Leiden University

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Original Article

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The Methodology of "Boolean OR" (T_1 OR T_2) Contrasted with "Versus" (T_1 Versus T_2)

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Introduction

It is extremely common for scholars to engage in what might be called "theory combats," which this paper generically refers to as the "versus" research goal. This involves pitting one theory, T_1, against another one, T_2. For example, for years—if not decades—in international relations scholars have pitted realism against rational choice—institutionalism versus social constructivism. If the study was statistical, then there would be variables representing each theory in the statistical model. Ideally, the author's preferred theory, T_1 hereafter, is statistically significant, while the competing theories (T_2) were not. It is also common for two or even all three of the variables representing these theories to be statistically significant.

It appears to be virtually obligatory for security studies articles and dissertations that the writer present alternative explanations and then explain why they do not work and why the author's preferred theory does. One can provide examples in comparative historical analysis and virtually every substantive area of political science.

In other substantive areas the versus approach is not particularly popular. For example, Fairfield and Charman (2025, 4) note: "In the environmental politics domain for example, of 56 relevant articles that we identified (since 2015) in two leading journals (Environmental Politics and Global Environmental Politics), only 10 included some effort to evaluate rival explanations in light of concrete evidence. Three of those ruled out the alternatives almost immediately, and none evaluated which hypothesized explanation made the evidence more expected."[1]

Bayesian approaches (e.g., Fairfield and Charman 2022) by definition require T_1 versus T_2 (the point they are making above). More generally, many process-tracing methodologies, focusing on individual cases, adopt a versus approach (e.g., Waldner 2025). Of course, there can be more than one alternative theory, and they must be mutually exclusive and ideally exhaustive in the Bayesian approach. In short, one cannot examine an individual hypothesis in isolation: it must be analyzed against some alternative.

Another potential goal within qualitative studies with a limited number of $Y = 1$ cases is to explain every case. As illustrated by QCA and Analytic Induction (AI), Ragin's new QCA-related methodology (2022), the ideal is to "cover," so to

1 Those who do randomized experiments do not worry about versus because they argue that randomization deals with confounders and alternative explanations.

speak, all the $Y = 1$ cases. Here the goal is not to test T_1 against T_2 but to develop a causal model which explains all $Y = 1$ cases.

This often implies a Boolean OR project, where one needs more than one theory or causal mechanism to achieve the goal of explaining all cases. Thus, equifinality becomes a core concept: there are multiple paths or mechanisms that explain a given outcome. If this is the case, then the model which explains all the outcomes typically employs the Boolean OR: T_1 OR T_2 explains all $Y = 1$.

So, in both setups we have two or more theories, T_i. In the first setup, the research goal is to test T_1 versus T_2. In the second setup, the goal is to explain all $Y = 1$ cases, which requires the use of (T_1 OR T_2). The purpose of this short essay is to explore the methodological differences between these two research goals. As we shall see, the cases needed, used, and not used are different for each goal. However, the same data can be explored and examined using the two different methodologies. The same basic data can be used, but how they are used differs.

Staniland's (2021) article on rebel insurgencies in South Asia provides a nice example of a security studies article framed in the traditional versus manner. We can also explore the logical OR goal of covering all the $Y = 1$ cases using his two theories and data.

I use Gerschewski's recent book (2023) on authoritarianism as an example in which the goal is clearly to explain all the authoritarian regimes within the scope of the study (East Asia 1945–2008). Gerschewski employs QCA as a final data analysis technique which relies on the Boolean OR to connect his two paths to stable authoritarianism. His theory identifies two mechanisms —T_1 and T_2— but he is not pitting one against the other. For him, there are multiple paths to stable authoritarianism, and he wants to know them all: he is not testing one theory versus another.

In summary, it is the difference in the basic goals of the research enterprise which drives methodological differences:

> One common goal in qualitative research is to explain or cover all the $Y = 1$ cases. This may —or may not— involve multiple theories or mechanisms T_i connected by the Boolean OR.
>
> Another common goal in qualitative research is to evaluate T_1 versus T_2. Typically, the goal is to argue that the author's T_1 is better than some alternative T_1.

Both are valid, but they represent different objectives and require different methodologies.[2]

T_1 Versus T_2

Table 1 provides a framework for thinking about the versus project. The last column gives the numbers from Staniland, which I discuss below; here they serve to illustrate the methodology of the versus approach. Staniland's study is a $Y = 1$ generalization project: the numbers in Table 1 are all the $Y = 1$ cases. Hence, Ragin's Analytic Induction (2022) is a natural point of comparison from the QCA side.

Table 1: T_1 versus T_2: Staniland on leftist insurgencies in democracies

T_1	T_2	N
~T_1	T_2	1
T_1	T_2	2
T_1	~ T_2	9
~ T_1	~ T_2	0

Source: Staniland (2021).

The first two columns distribute cases on the basis of whether, within-case, process tracing inference supports one of the four logical possibilities: (1) the case supports both T_1 and T_2;

2 A note on terminology. I often say T_1 "explains" a case. Depending on the theoretical and empirical context this can mean a relatively complete explanation of $Y = 1$ or that T_1 is a cause(s) of $Y = 1$ in all cases, though not necessarily a "complete" explanation.

(2) it supports T_2 but not T_1; (3) it supports T_1 but not T_2; (4) it supports neither ($\sim T_1$ means that T_1 does not explain the case while T_1 means that it does). The third column gives the number of cases in Staniland (2021) for each row.[3]

In the versus methodology, one is specifically claiming that a given theory does not explain, for example, $\sim T_2$, while T_1 does explain. The useful and informative rows are thus those where the two theories disagree: rows two and three. In Table 1, T_1 is the "winner" because it explains nine cases, whereas the alternative T_2 explains only two. In the ideal versus scenario the alternative T_2 would explain zero cases. In Table 1 this would be eleven versus zero: a decisive win for T_1.

Absolutely critical to the versus research agenda is that the first and fourth rows are irrelevant: these rows contain uninformative cases. Since the two rows do not differentiate between T_1 and T_2, they cannot provide any information about the relative merits of the two theories. The same conclusion would be reached in a Bayesian analysis: evidence is only useful if it can distinguish between the two hypotheses.

However, for the Boolean OR, both the first and last rows provide information about the Boolean OR regularity. First, we can ask about row four, where neither theory works. For the Boolean OR these are disconfirming cases, so they are highly informative. Thus, as this number increases the Boolean OR regularity decreases. For example, suppose we had 100 cases in that row. The versus results remain unchanged because that row does not matter. But the Boolean regularity is now very weak: (1+2+9)/112 = .11. We therefore have a situation where the versus results are quite strong, nine versus two (or 9/11 = .82) in favor of T_1—while the Boolean OR results are weak at .11.

The versus project does not find row four informative, whereas it is crucial to the Boolean OR program. Hence, it is quite possible for there to be many cases in row four, generating a weak Boolean OR regularity, while the versus project has extremely high levels of support with eleven cases in row two and zero in row three.

We can now inquire about row one, where both T_1 and T_2 work. These are uninformative cases for the versus project but are conforming and confirming cases for the Boolean OR. For the Boolean OR it does not matter that both work, provided that at least one does; these cases therefore support the Boolean OR model.

Is it possible that the data weakly support the versus but strongly support the Boolean OR? The versus results are the weakest when rows two and three have the same numbers. So, if T_2 had nine cases it would work as well when T_1 also has nine cases. However, the Boolean OR does not care about how the cases are distributed between the two theories. Consequently, one can easily have a 1.0 Boolean OR regularity even when the versus project yields a tie, leaving no advantage to either theory.

What about a scenario in which both approaches are strong? This would be close to what Staniland found. Row one supports the Boolean OR, but for the versus project it would be preferable if there were no cases in this row (Staniland reports only one). Ideally, for the versus project there would be eleven cases in the T_1 row and zero cases in the T_2 row; Staniland has nine versus two. For the Boolean OR, the distribution of cases between those rows does not matter, since they both support the Boolean OR. The number of cases in the fourth row is irrelevant for the versus project because they are uninformative. Optimally, for the versus project there would be no cases in this row. However, they are crucial for the Boolean OR. Staniland has no disconfirming cases for the Boolean OR in that row. In short, the data in Table 1 simultaneously support both the versus and Boolean OR agendas quite well.

In short, one can easily generate examples of all combinations in which the versus results are strong or weak and the Boolean OR results are strong or weak. This means that these projects employ different methodologies and draw on different cases, so they do not necessarily agree or disagree with each other.

**

3 For simplicity these are considered 0–1 decisions, but one could certainly give partial weights (e.g., .60 versus .40).

It is useful to introduce the concept of the uncertainty of the versus results. One way to illustrate the idea is to construct a table in which the versus results are perfect—using round numbers such as 10/10 for T_1. For methodological purposes, assume there are 100 cases in row one and 100 in row four. Uncertainty is calculated as one minus the percentage of informative cases over the total number of cases. Thus, in our hypothetical example, uncertainty is 1 – (10/200) = .95, indicating very high uncertainty.

The intuition is that the abundance of uninformative cases undermines confidence in the versus results. Although T_1 explains ten cases, one hundred are explained by neither theory. That makes us uncertain about the versus results because they depend on such a small percentage of the total cases. Suppose there are one hundred cases explained by both theories in row one. Because T_1 and T_2 co-occur so frequently, it raises doubts about how different these theories truly are: if they almost always appear together, how different can they be? In short, many uninformative cases obscure even strong versus results, leaving us uncertain.

Looking at these hypothetical data from a QCA-AI perspective, we can see that half of the uncertainty stems from the large number of cases where neither theory works. In QCA terms, this is a situation of low coverage. So, uncertainty is a partial function of coverage. The second part comes from the row where both theories work. This pattern is common in QCA and arises when unique coverage is low. Thus, in QCA terms, uncertainty is a function of both overall coverage and low unique coverage.

Obviously, high certainty occurs when T_1 explains all of the cases. There are no cases in row one or row four. Staniland has only one case in these two rows, so the uncertainty level is low: 1−(11/12) = .08. In QCA terms this corresponds to high overall coverage and high unique coverage.

Staniland on Leftist Insurgency in South Asia

It is useful to see how the versus agenda plays out in Staniland's analysis of leftist insurgency in South Asia since 1945. Within his scope conditions he has 12 cases of Y = 1, the distribution of which is shown in Table 1 above.

Staniland (2021) explicitly proposes a (new) theoretical model (T_1) explaining leftist insurgency, which he pits against an influential T_2. T_2 has a long and distinguished pedigree, and Staniland pays particular attention to the work of Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) as a representative of that tradition. His empirical analysis claims that his theory outperforms that of Acemoglu and Robinson in explaining the Y = 1 cases within his scope.

Staniland's theory () can be summarized:

> Leftist insurgencies in full-suffrage democracies are most likely when divided leftist movements face moments of choice between mainstream electoral participation and violent extra-parliamentary mobilization. (Staniland 2021, 528)

T_1 can be expressed in Boolean terms as X_1 AND X_2, in which X_1 denotes divided leftist movements and X_2 denotes moments of choice between mainstream electoral participation and violent extra-parliamentary mobilization—the "left incorporation" theory.

The "incorporation window" occurs when political representation is expanding. Staniland operationalizes this concept by looking at whether a given country is experiencing (1) democratization and an expansion of left-wing participation, or (2) international pressure for democratization that includes openness toward the left. However, while incorporation windows are a necessary condition for leftist insurgencies to arise in democracies, the organizational structure of the opposition constitutes an additional condition. Staniland argues that when the left is cohesive, a dominant left-wing party can—if it wishes—steer its incorporation into the democratic political process. Yet if the opposition is fragmented, conflicts emerge between factions that advocate playing the democratic political game and those that push for more radical strategies, including the advocacy of violence.

He juxtaposes this against T_2:

> Leftist insurgencies arise in full-suffrage democracies when redistribution does not occur and political participation is blocked. (2021, 523)

So T_2 can be expressed in Boolean terms, as (1) no redistribution AND (2) political participation is blocked. He outlines the basic idea:

> Acemoglu and Robinson (2006, 26–27) note that democracies may not redistribute sufficiently to stave off revolt, but do not study such cases: "in reality, it will not always be the case that democracy is sufficiently pro-majority that it avoids revolution […] however, to limit the scope of our analysis, we normally restrict our attention to situations where the creation of democracy avoids revolution. Historically, this seems to have been typical, and it means that we do not delve deeply into theories of revolution." Huntington's (1968) classic work on revolution and political order similarly argues that "if a democracy acts in an 'undemocratic' manner by obstructing the expansion of political participation, it may well encourage revolution." (Staniland 2021, 522–3).

Staniland interprets Table 1 as a versus finding: of the 12 leftist insurgency cases, nine occur under left incorporation, two under state repression, and one shows evidence of both mechanisms. Thus 9/12 = .75 of the cases conform with Staniland's theory, 2/12 = .17 conform with the competing state repression theory, and 1/12 = .08 conform with both. Hence, his T_1 does significantly better—at least in terms of cases explained—than T_2.

These data could easily be interpreted as a logical OR Boolean model: there are two paths, (T_1 OR T_2), to insurgency and all cases conform to one or both paths. It is a 1.0 causal generalization for the Boolean OR model. For the Boolean model it does not really matter that T_1 explains more cases than T_2. The key point is that all the Y = 1 cases are explained. In his conclusions Staniland (2021, 532) recognizes this: "Leftist insurgency is characterized by 'equifinality'—there are multiple pathways to onset that cluster into a small number of clearly-identifiable mechanisms."

Research can therefore be interpreted in different ways both by the author and readers. A Boolean-oriented reader can adopt that reading and generalization of Staniland; or one can follow Staniland's versus interpretation of his results. The causal generalizations are different for each reflecting different research goals. Thus, Staniland's work takes on the flavor of a Rashomon effect: the story changes depending on whether one adopts a versus mode or tells the story from a Boolean OR perspective.

T_1 OR T_2: Gerschewski on the Two Logics of Authoritarian Rule

It is useful to look at an example motivated by the Boolean OR. Gerschewski's recent book (2023) on the two logics of authoritarianism provides a clear example. As the title suggests, he is interested in two logics that are quite different and that lead to stable authoritarian regimes. He does not frame this as a versus project; instead, it is an attempt to explain all stable authoritarian regimes (of course, the book has other objectives as well).

He outlines his two logics:

> Two configurations for explaining autocratic regime stability stand out. Autocracies can either over-politicize or de-politicize their people […] while the former logic activates the people, the latter renders them passive. In the over-politicizing world, autocracies aim at mass societal mobilization and try to win the hearts and minds of ordinary people. They seek to construct and anchor a legitimacy belief in their citizens. This legitimacy belief can rest on full-fledged political ideologies like communism or fascism, but it can also hark back to thin ideologies like nationalism or the politicization of religion and ethnicity. A regime's legitimation efforts justify—and sometimes even demand—the use of soft and hard repression measures framed as vital for the sake of the higher ideological good. Meanwhile, co-optation usually takes place via formal channels in the over-politicizing world of autocracies. The party

is emblematic of the "organizational weapon" that secures intra-elite unity. Standing in stark contrast to the over-politicizing logic is the second logic of de-politicization.

In the de-politicizing world, autocracies aim at the contrary. De-politicizing the public means that instead of mobilizing the masses via ideologies, the citizenry is discouraged from political participation and is kept "satisfied." People are expected to remain apolitical and be excluded from the political arena. Mass political apathy is achieved and assured by socioeconomic performance and public good provision. As long as the regime delivers public goods such as economic growth, social welfare, and law and order, the population is expected to avoid engaging in the thorny business of politics. Legitimation via performance is then complemented by the absence of hard repression, which might ignite protest and become a catalyst that drives people to the streets. In other words, hard repression can break the fragile autocratic contract in which political abstinence is tolerated as long as the incumbent regime delivers. (Gerschewski 2023, 15)

He has three "pillars," which are causes of durable authoritarianism: (1) legitimacy, (2) repression, and (3) co-optation. Each pillar has two specific forms: ideational or performance for legitimacy; hard or soft for repression; formal or informal for co-optation. This produces six variables for use in his QCA analysis.

In line with his Boolean OR goal he wants to explain or cover all the $Y = 1$ cases. The empirical scope of his analysis is all authoritarian regime episodes, of which there are 45 in the period between 1945 and 2008 in thirteen East Asian countries: Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), North Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

In Chapter 8 he conducts a QCA analysis to see, among other things, if his logics cover all the $Y = 1$ cases. Table 2 provides a first summary of his results for my purposes. The $Y = 1$ row gives the number of cases in that particular path. This is analogous to the number of cases for each theory for Staniland in Table 1. Unlike Staniland, Gerschewski's two theories cover about 69 percent of the cases, meaning that 31 percent of the cases are unexplained by either theory. While these cases are not informative for Staniland, they are central for the Boolean OR model: they constitute the disconfirming cases for the that model.

Table 2: Logical OR: Gerschewski on paths to stable authoritarianism

Stable Authoritarianism	Other paths	T_1 De-politicized	T_2 Over-politicized
Y = 1 (N)	10	8	14
Y = 1 (%)	.31	.25	.44

Table 3: Logical OR: Gerschewski on paths to stable authoritarianism

Stable Authoritarianism	Other paths	T_3 Repression	T_1 De-politicized	T_2 Over-politicized
Y = 1 (N)	6	4	8	14
Y = 1 (%)	.19	.12	.25	.44

It turns out that no cases are explained by two or more paths in Gerschewski's analysis. In QCA terms, coverage is unique. Every case belongs to one and only one of the columns in Table 2. In other words, the three paths are mutually exclusive; they uniquely cover the 32 $Y = 1$ cases.

T_1 –over-politicized– has 14 cases. I have combined Gerschewski's two "de-politicized" variants into one in Table 2, which contains eight cases. Thus, in the versus competition over-politicization has almost twice as many cases as the de-politicization path with eight. In Staniland, the numbers are nine versus two cases for his two theories. But since versus is not a big part of Gerschewski's project, he does not dwell on this fact in his analysis.

The QCA analysis also revealed a third path —T_3— that was not originally theorized by Gerschewski. I call this the "repression" path. T_3 suggests that (almost) pure repression can be sufficient to produce stable authoritarian regimes. Gerschewski devotes a lengthy discussion, most notably in Chapter 5, on the complementarity (or not) of legitimization, repression, and co-optation that addresses these issues. Table 3 presents the QCA analysis with the new repression path.

In terms of the versus project the new repression path is not very relevant and additionally accounts for only four cases—essentially Myanmar with 3/4 cases. This illustrates an important feature of the Boolean OR project: even when a path is empirically minor in terms of number of cases, it can be important theoretically. The fact that so few cases follow a pure repression path may signal that achieving stable authoritarianism through pure repression is difficult.

There remain six cases in the "other paths" column. It could well be that these require causal factors and variables outside Gerschewski's three pillars. They might provide insights into other ways to arrive at stable authoritarianism. By contrast, Staniland has no cases not explained by one of the two theories—a situation that is quite rare in the QCA context.

Notice that since a goal of the Boolean model is to cover all the $Y = 1$ cases, discovering new and potentially interesting causal mechanisms is not problematic. In contrast, such discoveries are irrelevant for the versus agenda. Again, these cases are not informative regarding the two competing theories, though one might want to expand the competition to a three-way comparison.

Conclusion

The reader will have realized that the Boolean OR and the versus projects can converge, and I have discussed how that can happen above. They converge completely when T_1 covers all the $Y = 1$ cases and T_2 explains none of them. While this might occur from time to time, it is unlikely to be a common scenario. Nevertheless, there can be synergy between the two. A given study could discuss the versus aspects of the results as well as the Boolean OR dimensions.

One goal of this essay is to build bridges between the two. These two methodological islands have little contact either in practice or in the methodological literature. My discussion of Staniland and Gerschewski suggests some ways in which the two approaches can talk to each other.

Fundamentally, however, they differ on which cases are useful and how they are useful. Unsurprisingly, for the versus project only cases where the two theories diverge can inform the analysis. Cases where T_1 and T_2 agree—either because they both work or both do not work—are uninformative. In contrast, the cases where neither T_1 nor T_2 work are central to the Boolean OR analysis because they are disconfirming cases. If such cases constitute a large propportion of $Y = 1$ cases, the Boolean model is seriously challenged. By contrast, discarding out half the cases of $Y = 1$ because both theories agree is unfortunate, but is not fatal to the versus project.

A clear takeaway from this essay for the versus approach is to be explicit about the uninformative rows. At a minimum, report the number of cases in these rows, because they indicate the degree of uncertainty about the versus conclusions.

While it is beyond the scope of this essay, the versus discussion can inform $N = 1$ Bayesian process tracing. Fairfield and Charman (2022) argue that the cross-case evidence should always be included in the analysis. Thus, when conducting

a Bayesian analysis of a single case, all the versus rows provide important information.

These considerations have significant ramifications for case studies and process tracing. The cases selected for intensive case study research will vary between the two projects. For example, overdetermined cases are uninformative for the versus project and problematic for the Boolean OR because both theories apply. Goertz (2017) recommends avoiding such cases with his "Avoid Overdetermination Rule." If the purpose is to explore the logic of a given theory (e.g., T_1) in individual case studies then cases in rows one or four are unlikely to be useful. In the Boolean OR program, one would pay particular attention to the disconfirming cases where neither theory works, even though those cases are of little use in the versus project.

The point of this essay is that both projects—versus and Boolean OR—have value and illuminate important theoretical and empirical questions. However, they point in quite different theoretical and methodological directions. In practice, researchers would benefit from incorporating both the versus and Boolean OR into their analyses. Like Rashomon, each has an interesting but different story to tell.

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Subnational Research and the Challenge of Scope Conditions

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Introduction[1]

How do concepts and theories "travel" in political science? At least since Sartori's (1970) famous metaphor, the capacity to travel, or the possibility for concepts and theories to be generalized, is directly related to the notion of scope conditions. In a more general sense, scope conditions mark precisely the set of conditions under which we assume that the conceptual or theoretical propositions apply, and by implication, where due to contextual differences (e.g., temporal, spatial, institutional) these propositions lose their validity (Goertz and Mahoney 2009, 2012; Gauquelin 2021, 254). A corollary of this is that most of our theories are context-sensitive (i.e., not universally valid) (Goertz and Mahoney 2012, 206).

Historically, political scientists have privileged nation-states as units of analysis. Consequently, scope conditions, where stated,[2] tend to be defined in terms of country-level characteristics and variables. As a result, national level concepts and theories might not easily travel down to subnational politics and across subnational units in the territory. In this sense, the shift to subnational units of analysis and the study of local political phenomena, the so-called "subnational turn" in comparative politics (Singh 2017, 862; Sellers 2019, 86; Snyder 2001; Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019a), brings new challenges to our thinking about scope conditions. Scaling down to subnational levels of analysis (Snyder 2001) requires scholars to consider both the diverging dynamics between different levels of a political system as well as territorial heterogeneity in political and social phenomena. Not doing so might lead us to stretch concepts and theories beyond their intended remit.

In this article, I seek to systematize existing treatments of the problem of scope conditions in subnational research (SNR). Building on recent contributions (Giraudy 2015; Singh 2017; Soifer 2019; Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019a), I propose an integrated framework to think about these issues, identifying two different types of scope

1 A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the 8th Annual Southwest Workshop on Mixed Methods Research, held in 2023 at the University of Maryland, College Park. I thank the Workshop participants for their comments. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers and the editors of QMMR for their insighful comments and suggestions that substantially improved the article and the clarity of its arguments.

2 However, despite its inherent importance for both our conceptual and theoretical thinking, the issue of scope conditions has traditionally received relatively little attention in methodological literature (Goertz and Mahoney 2012, 205; Gauquelin 2021). And explicit statements of scope conditions are not so common to come by in extant studies. See Auerbach (2019, 26-7) for a recent exception.

conditions we ought to be more aware of when we work at subnational levels: vertical (inter-level) scope conditions (VSC) and horizontal (within-level) scope conditions (HSC). I characterize both scope conditions below and explore their conceptual and theoretical implications. Making scope conditions explicit, in turn, stresses the need to be more straightforward about how theories work vertically between levels and horizontally across territorial units, calls for more self-consciousness regarding possible limitations of our (national level) concepts and theories, and creates space for new research and conceptual and theoretical innovations.

In the next section, I define scope conditions and emphasize why they are necessary in (empirical) subnational research.[3] Subsequently, I discuss the two types of conditions I propose (vertical and horizontal), explain their logics and challenges, and illustrate their usefulness using examples from the literature on subnational democracy. I close by stressing the need to think about possible solutions to challenges that both types of scope conditions pose.

Dimensions of Scope Conditions and the Need to Think about Them More Explicitly

Scope conditions can be defined as "empirical and theoretical limits on the extent to which an inference can be generalized" (Goertz and Mahoney 2009, 307; see also Gauquelin 2021). Goertz and Mahoney (2009) suggest that there are two dimensions scholars must consider with respect to scope. On the one hand, there is conceptual scope that "refers to restrictions on generalization that arise from the need to maintain stability in the definition and measurement of the core conceptual entities of a theory" (309). On the other, theoretical or causal scope "refers to restrictions on generalization resulting from the need to maintain stability in the hypothesized causal linkage between independent and dependent variables" (313).

Since Snyder's (2001) pioneering study on the "subnational comparative method," the "subnational turn" in comparative politics and the rise of the SNR agenda (Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019a, 9; Sellers 2019, 86; Dosek 2020, 461), scholars have emphasized the necessity to study the differences between levels of the political system, as well as variation in political outcomes across the territory of nation-states. In this context, qualitative and mixed-methods research has been more self-conscious than quantitative studies regarding the possible limitations (and context-specificity) of concepts and theories and has therefore put more emphasis on thinking about scope conditions.

Failing to clearly define and explicitly report scope conditions in SNR can have negative consequences for concept validity and for the generalizability of our theoretical arguments. First, conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970) is an issue in subnational research, for example, when concepts are forced to travel between (national, regional, local) levels of the political system or when identifying (apparently) similar subnational phenomenon in federal and in unitary countries. The problem is not necessarily making concepts too broad or too narrow (Brancati 2018), but the fact that they cannot capture adequately the phenomena studied due to subnational contextual differences. Adequate concept formation therefore needs to consider local particularities to have internal validity and thus allow for precise measurement and descriptive inferences.

Second, the lack of an explicit statement of scope conditions may lead to overgeneralizations, both within and between countries, and thus to problems of external validity.[4] For example, modernization theory, commonly applied at the national level, does not necessarily work well at the subnational level (Giraudy 2015, 44).[5] As Giraudy posits, the relation between democracy and economic development

3 Given space constrains and the focus of the article on subnational research agenda, this article does not offer a general treatment of scope conditions in political science.

4 Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder (2019a, 6) refer to "overextended theories."

5 However, see the recent study by Pérez Sandoval (2023, 733-34) for evidence to the contrary, claiming that modernization theory seems to apply in Argentina and Brazil, though not in Mexico.

is not linear, as relatively economically developed Argentine provinces and Mexican states can co-exist with undemocratic subnational regimes (see also Gervasoni 2010). Theories cannot be automatically "stretched" between levels (Singh 2017; Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019a; Soifer 2019),[6] and as Gibson (2012, 9) argues for the theory of subnational political regimes, we need to examine "which theories developed for the study of countries can be transferred to the study of provinces."

Finally, existing concepts and theories in subnational research are often based on just a handful of cases from each country. Given territorial variation in social and political phenomena, this bias in case selection might be problematic as it implicitly assumes that our concepts and theories travel well across the territory. However, as Snyder (2001) warned us early on, the representativeness of best-known subnational units or capital cities might be limited due to countries' territorial heterogeneity. [7] Deriving concepts and theories just from certain prototypical cases might therefore compromise their external validity at the subnational level (i.e., across subnational units). Take for example the study of clientelism in Argentina. The vast majority of empirical accounts analyze the province of Buenos Aires where the Partido Justicialista (PJ) is dominant. Does this mean that clientelism in Argentina works the same way in other provinces and where PJ is not the dominant party? We do not know, but scholars could think more explicitly about possible scope conditions on arguments derived from just one (or a few) case(s). Diversification of the cases analyzed at the subnational level combined with awareness that concepts and theories might not travel well across the territory could push thinking about scope conditions in subnational research forward. In what follows, I discuss the two types of scope conditions researchers ought to consider in SNR.

Two Types of Scope Conditions in Subnational Research: Vertical and Horizontal Scope Conditions

Vertical (Inter-level) Scope Conditions

Vertical (inter-level) scope conditions (VSC) capture the idea that a concept or a theory does not necessarily travel well between levels of analysis (Singh 2017; Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019a, 17). As Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder (2019a, 6) posit, "theory stretching" is a real problem that can condition the applicability of theories designed for the national level at the subnational level. And the same applies for concepts and conceptual stretching between levels. VSC invites us to reflect on the possible limits of conceptual and theoretical arguments derived from choosing a certain level (and unit) of analysis for empirical research. Put differently, the concept of VSC points to the potential inapplicability of concepts and theories across levels (i.e., their inability to travel up and down) (Singh 2017, 869-70) and proposes that levels of analysis can work as scope conditions.

The idea of theory stretching has been (implicitly) formulated in the SNR literature based on the limitations inherent to applying national-level theories at the intermediate levels of analysis (i.e., regions, provinces). However, this problem is not limited to federal countries and their intermediate units (Zuo 2015; Pino Uribe 2017). As recent research has shown, the warning against the risks associated with theory stretching must be also extended to the local level (Ordóñez 2023; Dosek 2024).8 Local politics, in turn, offers new instances for theory testing. Municipalities (and similar local-level units of analysis) must be taken into account and the empirical analyses broadened to this level. Consequently, we need to more fully incorporate unitary countries into subnational research.

VSC present several challenges for the study of (subnational) politics. First, concepts need to be adjusted to local conditions and the particularities

6 See Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder (2019a) for other empirical examples.
7 In general, this goes for any type of subnational unit.
8 Local level refers here to both municipal and submunicipal jurisdictional units as well as non-jurisdictional territorial units (e.g., favelas, valleys, settlements).

of each level of analysis. For instance, Dosek (2024) argues that at the municipal level, and particularly in unitary countries, the application of the concept of "subnational political regime," which focuses on rules that govern both access to and the exercise of power, is inadequate. It simply doesn't capture local power dynamics. This is because municipalities do not have their own constitutions; mayors cannot reform electoral rules, and these rules are territorially uniform and imposed (and changed) by national governments. Consequently, the author proposes to focus on the political leaders and their exercise of power (rather than access to it) in order to understand how local democracy works.

Second, we need to rethink how and when theories apply at different (institutional) levels of analysis. As already mentioned, Giraudy (2015) offers an illustrative example. The author questions the direct application of the modernization theory to subnational levels in her study of non-democratic regimes. Giraudy (2015), as well as Gervasoni (2010), demonstrate that the relationship between subnational democracy and economic development is far from linear in Argentine provinces and Mexican states. We therefore need alternative theories to account for the existence and reproduction of subnational non-democratic regimes. Where national-level theories are not verified at the subnational level, we need more precise scope conditions on the original theories and, if needed, develop different explanations for the same phenomenon at different levels of analysis. In other words, we should not assume that theories are generally applicable across different levels of analysis. This in turn reminds us of the possibility of inter-level "equifinality" (George and Bennet 2005) and the importance of thinking more clearly about what it is that makes things work at different levels. As Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder (2019b) suggest, this requires a concerted effort to analyze the same phenomenon at different levels.

Horizontal (Within-Level) Scope Conditions

Horizontal (within-level) scope conditions (HSC) reflect the idea that concepts and theories do not necessarily travel well across the territorial units at the same level of analysis. First, some concepts might need further adjustment in order to travel well horizontally. Second, our descriptive and causal arguments might not work well across the territory, as they might be suitable just for a certain type (or subset) of subnational units (Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019a, Soifer 2019). This forces us to think about HSC as potential limits to arguments derived from choosing certain units of analysis as our object of study. It thus reflects the challenges to generalizing arguments across subnational units at the same territorial level of political systems (both within and between countries).

Two issues stand out regarding the conceptual dimension of the problem. On the one hand, there are different types of territorial units of analysis at each subnational level. They might be jurisdictional (formal) as well as non-jurisdictional (informal) (Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019a, 7; Soifer 2019, 93) and they might therefore require different concepts to understand similar phenomena. In other words, the concepts might not travel well between these types of units of analysis. Take, for example, the concept of "subnational authoritarianism" (Gibson 2012). This concept is intimately linked to a jurisdictional type of unit. In contrast, the concept of "criminal governance"[9] tends to be associated with non-jurisdictional units such as *barrio* or *favela* or even to a valley. Given this distinction, is it possible to speak of criminal governance when referring to a formal jurisdictional unit? Is there an overlap between the two if a subnational autocrat colludes with an illegal actor and jointly exercises control over the population of the district (i.e., jurisdictional unit)? Thinking more clearly about the scope conditions of a concept–with regards to a particular type of unit of analysis–helps us evaluate if and how a concept can be suitable in different

9 Although there are different definitions of criminal governance, it broadly reflects the imposition of basic order (and even public service provision) through formal and informal institutions by illegal or criminal actors on citizens in a given part of territory (Barnes 2017; Lessing 2021).

settings or if its applicability is limited to certain type of subnational units and scope conditions need to be imposed. For this reason, Soifer (2019) urges clarity regarding the specific units of analysis to which our theory applies.[10]

On the other hand, exploration of territorial heterogeneity in political and social phenomena often leads to the formulation of new concepts or conceptual typologies. O'Donnell's (1993) concept of "brown areas,"[11] and his broader classification of subnational regions as either blue, green, or brown depending on the relative presence of the state, provides a good example. O'Donnell's contribution highlighted the inadequacy of the term "democracy" as a characterization of some subnational units (a previously unquestioned assumption), due to the limited functional and territorial presence of the state in some areas of the national territory. In a similar fashion, Mendes da Rocha (2021, 190) finds that *governismo*, a concept created to characterize powerful Brazilian mayors who, among other things, exercise tight control over councilors, is not only empirically less frequent than previously thought, but might only capture the dynamics of small municipalities. In other words, the concept of *governismo*, although useful, does not characterize all local governments in Brazil and scholars need to specify its (conceptual) scope conditions.

Regarding the theoretical dimension of HSC, there are also two different issues at stake. First, some subnational units might be more comparable to each other than others. For example, just because two localities are nominally municipalities, the continuity of local leaders in power for a prolonged period need not necessarily obey for the same reasons. For instance, size and distance from the capital and other big cities can be important factors in structuring local political life. In bigger municipalities and cities, state presence is normally higher, fiscal dependence on higher-level authorities lower, politics more plural, and the need for an organizational structure to exercise control over the territory more pressing. By contrast, in smaller and more peripheral municipalities, state presence tends to be more limited, fiscal dependence greater, the space for the opposition smaller, and local political dynamics more likely to revolve around family or clan structures rather than party organizations. Without being the only theoretically important factors, existing research seems to suggest that municipal size and geographical location might constitute scope conditions for our explanations of how local democracy and party competition work (Mendes da Rocha 2021; Kersting et al. 2009, McMann et al. 2021, Kouba and Dosek 2022). Consequently, we might need different theories to understand the reproduction of local politicians in more populous and urban settings vis-à-vis smaller, rural districts. Again, stating explicitly to which type of units of analysis our theories are applicable would be helpful (Soifer 2019).

Extreme cases of incomparability are what Pepinsky (2017) calls "regions of exception." These are subnational units characterized by distinct historical conditions and social structures that limit the use "of subnational comparison as a tool for causal inference" (Pepinsky 2017, 1035). Pepinsky (2017) argues that they cannot be included in large-N comparative analyses and require separate (case) studies. This unit heterogeneity might pose a problem for mainstream single-country quantitative analyses that aim at hypothesis testing. Qualitative and mixed methods research designs, particularly those oriented towards theory building, are better equipped to uncover and examine such cases (Ingram 2015). We first need to accumulate more descriptive knowledge about a higher number of subnational cases in order to be able to identify these regions.

Second, particularly in new research topics where most studies are exploratory, our theories of a given phenomenon are derived from (and probably conditioned by) a handful of cases that might be "paradigmatic." As Solomon (2022) explains, these are cases that help establish a research

10 As he points out, there are relatively few "unit-independent theories" (Soifer 2019, 104).

11 The concept refers to parts of national territory where the state is absent in both territorial and functional terms (O'Donnell 1993, 1359). In contrast, where both dimensions of state are present, the author labels them as "blue areas." The intermediate cases are labeled as "green areas," where the state is present territorially but not functionally.

agenda or scholarly paradigm.[12] Although the focus on this type of case, which normally features strong manifestations of the outcome of interest, is justifiable in qualitative and mixed methods research (George and Bennet 2005; Brady and Collier 2010), it may have negative consequences for theory building. Put differently, limited diversity in subnational case selection may not only constrain our descriptive inferences and knowledge of how the same phenomenon works in comparable units; it can also condition our understanding of the causes or origins of certain phenomena. For example, the literature on subnational regimes has accumulated knowledge about the reproduction and, to a lesser extent, collapse of non-democratic regimes (Gibson 2012; Giraudy 2015; Behrend and Whitehead 2016; Dosek 2024). By contrast, we know almost next to nothing about how some subnational jurisdictional units become these regimes in the first place. This is in great part due to the absence of comparisons with (and in-depth study of) relevant negative cases (i.e., subnational democracies or not-so-authoritarian regimes). The research agenda and the scope of our theories might be therefore conditioned or limited by the absence of comparisons with relevant negative cases.

Conclusions

The recent subnational turn in comparative politics and the boom of subnational research have posed important challenges to our thinking about concepts and theories and their inherent (contextual) limitations. Building on similar notions in the existing literature, in this article I systematized and conceptualized more fully two types of scope conditions (vertical and horizontal) in subnational research, linked respectively to the differences between levels (VSC) and across territorial units at the same level of analysis (HSC). The article thus shows why VSC and HSC should be considered when the analysis shifts from national to subnational levels of analysis. Defining these scope conditions more explicitly avoids conceptual and theory stretching both between levels of analysis as well as across territorial units. In turn, they allow for concept adjustment and innovation, better descriptions, and new theoretical insights. In this effort, the article argues that the diversification of the cases we study, and more descriptive inference is crucial to identify VSC and HSC.

Beyond identifying and stating the scope conditions more explicitly in empirical work, scholars need to think more directly about possible solutions to these challenges. Although full treatment is beyond the scope of this article, I suggest that recent studies offer some examples of how to deal with them. Regarding VSC, responses to inter-level scope conditions imply more ontological and practical issues. On the one hand, we ought to acknowledge that to work theoretically at the subnational level, concepts often need to be adjusted or reconceptualized by taking into account the differences and particularities of provinces or municipalities vis-à-vis higher levels of analysis. On the other hand, testing theories at different levels allows us to establish whether they travel across levels of analysis.

As for HSC, dealing with within-level scope conditions involves research design and methodological adjustments, depending on whether the principal component of the analysis is more qualitative, case-oriented or quantitative. In qualitative work, which is usually oriented towards theory generation, exploration of the particularities and exceptionalities of our case studies vis-à-vis other subnational units (Pepinsky 2017), the use of theoretical typologies (Pasotti 2010), and small or medium N subnational comparative designs featuring variation in the main independent variables of interest (Selee 2012; Dosek 2020), have all been used. In quantitative work focused on theory testing, some studies use a most different systems case selection for survey research in municipalities (Oliveros 2021), while others employ versions of Lieberman's (2005) nested research designs in the quantitative-qualitative sequence (Niedzwiecki 2018).

12 This is, for example, the case with the literature on subnational political regimes, centering heavily on Argentine province of Santiago del Estero, Mexican state of Oaxaca, or Brazilian state of Bahía.

More generally, awareness of the possible limitations of our theories and thinking comparatively–both beyond (single) national and subnational case(s)–can help us. In the end, the methodological and research design responses, particularly from qualitative and mixed methods research, are useful insofar as we acknowledge that the reality is more complex and the capacity to travel (between levels and across territory) of our concepts and theories limited, an issue that subnational research has called our attention to.

The article thus joins the call to strengthen our general attention to scope conditions and the need to think about them more explicitly, as they are not very often analyzed directly in the empirical literature. Implicitly it also stresses the need to rely on more comparative data across countries and across levels. Scant comparable subnational data hinders subnational research in general and between-countries subnational comparisons in particular. To overcome the single-country studies and the mean-spirited characterization of countries (Snyder 2001; Pepinsky 2019; Dosek 2020), we need more comparable local level data. This would, in turn, foment the testing of theories (and conceptual discussions) between levels and across subnational units (in different countries). The absence of comparative data not only cements national-level bias, but also conditions the cases and phenomena studied at the subnational level, our knowledge about them, and the ability to uncover subnational determinants of national phenomena and even territorial variation in national phenomena.

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Crossing Borders, Expanding Evidence, and Strengthening Theory: Synergies Between Subnational and Mixed-Method Research[1]

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Introduction

Over five decades ago, Stein Rokkan warned against the "whole-nation bias" constraining comparative political analysis (Rokkan 1970). Roughly two decades later, Gabriel Almond (1988) expressed concerns that political scientists and comparativists sat at "separate tables," divided by seemingly insurmountable methodological and epistemological commitments. In the years since, two major developments have responded to these critiques and reshaped empirical research in the social sciences[2]: (*i*) the recent rise of subnational research designs (SNR) and (*ii*) the growing adoption of mixed-method approaches (MMR). While each has generated its own body of scholarship—offering sound guidance to practitioners (e.g., Berg-Schlosser 2012; Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019)—they have rarely been examined in tandem. This omission reflects the distinct intellectual lineages from which they emerged: SNR from attention to variation *inside* countries, and MMR from efforts to bridge qualitative and quantitative traditions. Yet given their growing prevalence (see Figure 1) and their increasing intersection in research practice, in this paper I explore the shared strengths and challenges of SNR and MMR, arguing that when deployed together they can (and in fact do) operate as mutually reinforcing logics of social inquiry.

To telegraph the discussion, I argue that MMR and SNR jointly push researchers along three dimensions. First, they demand *boundary-crossing*: MMR requires combining and interpreting evidence grounded in different epistemological traditions, while SNR entails traversing administrative and non-administrative territorial units within and across countries. Second, they foster *evidentiary expansion* by multiplying the sources and types of data available for inference. Finally, they enable *theoretical enhancement*, both by refining existing arguments—such as through the recasting of scope

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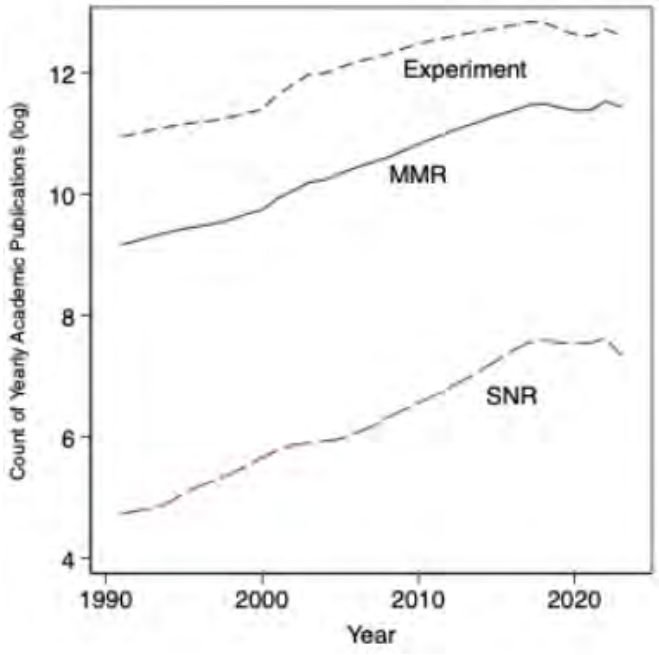
2 A third relevant methodological development is, of course, the rise of experimental and causal or design-based inference. For a thorough overview of the discipline see Munck and Snyder (2007). For a detailed discussion on experiments and the "identification revolution" (see, for example, Barringer, Eliason, and Leahey 2013).

conditions—and by opening avenues for theoretical innovation. As I also discuss, these three synergies are accompanied by shared challenges as well as common strategies for addressing them.

Figure 1. Count of Academic Outputs by Research Type in the Social Sciences (1990-2024)



Note: Built by the author based on the OpenAlex database.[3] Yearly counts include academic publications (papers, books, datasets) containing the phrases "experimental," "multi method" (MMR), and "subnational" (SNR) in their title, abstract, or metadata. The results are filtered for "social sciences" as a field of study. Given the parameters of the search, the reported estimates are likely an overestimation. However, they do provide a good descriptive approximation of the growth across these methodological approaches.

The article proceeds as follows. I begin by briefly outlining the contours of MMR and SNR individually. In the third section I identify the three key dimensions along which these two research strategies exhibit parallelisms, while also outlining a set of shared challenges and the strategies scholars adopt to tackle them. To do so, I rely on existing SNR and MMR literature, and rather than adjudicating between existing debates within each individual research approach, my aim here is more modest: to help practitioners and foster methodological reflection by highlighting the synergies that surface when SNR and MMR are jointly deployed. As such, while the dimensions, challenges, and mitigation strategies identified are neither exhaustive nor exclusive to MMR, SNR (or their joint deployment), they do frequently emerge in tandem and are often embedded in the practice of research. In the fourth section, I illustrate my claims concerning the complementary logic of subnational and mixed-method research by drawing examples from three now-classic contributions: Agustina Giraudy's *Democrats and Autocrats* (2015), Tulia Falleti's *Decentralization and Subnational Politics in Latin America* (2010), and Matthew Ingram's *Crafting Courts in New Democracies* (2016). Rather than an in-depth review of each piece, or replacing reading the original materials, this brief discussion should be understood as an invitation to revisit them—since only through direct engagement can the synergies of MMR and SNR be fully appreciated. I conclude with a set of final reflections on the broader implications of aligning MMR and SNR as complementary logics of inquiry.

What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Mixed-Methods and Subnational Research?

Mixed-methods research "involves combining data-gathering and -analyzing techniques from two or more methodological traditions" (Seawright 2016, 2), typically quantitative and qualitative, blending *variance*-based and *case*-based analytical tools to varying degrees (Beach 2020)[4]. The core of the case-based tradition lies

3 OpenAlex builds on the Microsoft Academic Graph (MAG) initiative. It is a digital bibliographic catalogue of scientific papers, institutions, and authors similar to Clarivate's Web of Science and its competitor Scopus. Unlike these alternatives, however, OpenAlex is open access, and unlike Google Scholar, it allows filtering the outputs by fields of study. Values were obtained through the website's API via the statistical programming language R.

4 This refers specifically to whether researchers opt for integration or triangulation. That is, whether they combine different types of evidence to answer the same question, or whether they weave different types of evidence to answer fundamentally distinct (albeit related) inquiries (see Fetters and Freshwater 2015; Hammersley 2008).

in tracing and unpacking causal mechanisms, whereas variance-based approaches focus on identifying average treatment effects. While scholars disagree on the extent or the framework under which these traditions can be combined (e.g., Fairfield and Charman 2022; Goertz and Mahoney 2012), echoing Przeworski (2009) and Van Evera (1997), the central tenet is that the strength of mixed-method research lies in its ability to weave together data uncovering *both* the effect of causes and the causes behind said effect, maximizing the evidence that can be leveraged to articulate more *satisfying explanations*.

For its part, subnational research (SNR) is defined as "a strategy of social science inquiry that focuses on actors, organizations, institutions, structures, and processes located in territorial units inside countries, that is, *below* the national and international levels" (Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019, 7; emphasis my own). Two core considerations define this approach. The first is spatial: by putting territory front at center, SNR requires the demarcation of (in)formal spaces inside countries–such as regions, neighborhoods, municipalities, or provinces—as meaningful *levels* of analysis (Harbers and Ingram 2019; Soifer 2019). The second consideration pertains to the individual or collective actors or factors whose actions, effects and dynamics unfold within, across, or between territorial levels. This second consideration then corresponds to identifying the *units* of analysis that exert causal force inside a given space. These levels and units of analysis are often interdependent and can be identified either deductively or inductively through "casing" (Soss 2021). Like MMR, SNR holds the promise of generating more satisfying explanations by unpacking variation, increasing the number of observations, and incentivizing theoretical innovation (Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019; Snyder 2001; Tillin 2013).

MMR and SNR: Three Common Dimensions Behind their Synergy

The synergy between mixed-method research (MMR) and subnational research (SNR) stems from the fact that these research strategies face parallelisms across at least three key dimensions. First, both approaches involve (*i*) *boundary-crossing*: MMR navigates philosophical boundaries (epistemological and ontological) while SNR traverses territorial and spatial ones. Second, MMR and SNR both facilitate (*ii*) *evidentiary expansion*. MMR achieves this by weaving together different types of evidence (to varying degrees), while SNR enables diversification through the disaggregation of observations (increasing N) and by differentiating contexts and spaces (i.e., cases) in which data can be gathered and analyzed. Third, these two dimensions—boundary-crossing and evidentiary expansion—underpin a shared capacity for (*iii*) *theoretical enhancement*. By leveraging diverse types of evidence across varied spatial contexts, both MMR and SNR support robust theory-building and theory-testing exercises. When deployed together, their logics of inquiry—data integration in MMR and spatial differentiation in SNR—become mutually reinforcing, enabling scholars to generate and evaluate theoretical claims with greater precision and contextual sensitivity.

Boundary-Crossing refers to the capacity of research designs to move beyond conventional dividing lines—whether philosophical or spatial. In mixed-methods research (MMR), this means weaving together variance-based and case-based traditions[5] in a way that bridges epistemological divides and combines distinct logics of inference.[6] In subnational research (SNR), boundary-crossing entails moving across territorial levels inside countries, linking local, regional, national and even non-jurisdictional or non-administrative political arenas. As such, we can identify boundary-crossing when a study connects evidence or arguments that traverse either methodological or territorial divides,

5 MMR also crosses philosophical boundaries by for example, bridging positivist quantitative tools and traditions to more constructivist approaches.

6 See Della Porta and Keating (2008) for a concise but thorough assessment of the distinct ontological and epistemological features of the positivists, interpretivist, and other approaches that permeate or operate within the social sciences.

showing how insights from one territorial domain or results obtained from distinct methodological traditions reinforce or challenge findings from another.

Evidentiary Expansion captures the way MMR and SNR broaden and diversify the types and the granularity of evidence that can be leveraged for causal and descriptive inference. In MMR, this involves integrating qualitative and quantitative evidence, i.e. weaving dataset and causal process observations (e.g., Brady and Collier 2004) into complementary analyses, thereby maximizing what can be learned about a topic. In SNR, evidentiary expansion arises from disaggregating observations within countries, thereby increasing both the number of cases (N) and the variety of sources from which data are drawn. That is, we can identify evidentiary expansion when a study leverages more than a single stream of data, combining multiple kinds of evidence obtained across multiple territorial levels to bolster descriptive or causal claims.[7]

Theoretical Enhancement refers to the contribution of MMR and SNR to building stronger, more satisfying theories (Van Evera 1997), going beyond the explanation of variance to probe the individual, institutional, and territorial foundations of causal dynamics. By crossing methodological and territorial boundaries and broadening the evidentiary base, both approaches create opportunities to adjudicate rival explanations, sharpen concepts and scope conditions, and generate new descriptive and explanatory insights. In MMR, this often involves deploying multiple modes of inquiry to triangulate causal claims or reveal mechanisms invisible to a single method. In SNR, it entails exploiting subnational variation—whether in the dependent or independent variable—to refine theoretical specifications and recalibrate scope conditions. In sum, we can identify theoretical enhancement when research not only provides richer empirical evidence but also leverages it to advance, refine, or reframe theoretical frameworks, thereby updating the conventional wisdom on a given subject.

Shared Challenges

Across these three dimensions, the complementarities of MMR and SNR are also mirrored in the challenges faced by each approach, and in the strategies adopted to mitigate them. One central challenge across both forms of boundary-crossing is *congruence*: the difficulty of ensuring analytical coherence and compatibility across different types of evidence and across varying spatial levels of analysis. In MMR, researchers often shift between variance or case-based tools either in parallel or sequential phases (Hesse-Biber 2010; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010). The task is to either *triangulate* or *integrate* diverse forms of evidence in a way that remains both rigorous and convincing.[8]

A similar issue emerges in SNR, where scholars move across territorial scales. As highlighted in the SNR-methodological literature, in an abstract sense, subnational research can follow either a *unilevel* or a *multilevel* logic[9] (Eaton and Giraudy 2025; Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019). Explanations following the former rationale confine themselves to a single territorial level, while the latter accounts move along multiple levels—the national, the subnational, or even the international one. Just as in MMR, one key challenge for SNR is achieving congruence: developing arguments

7 For example, by scaling down (Snyder 2001), researchers can access not only national but also local archives, expand the pool of relevant actors to interview, and multiply the fieldwork sites pertinent to a given study.

8 Fairfield and Charman (2022) have argued that the only epistemological framework that ensures that these philosophical borders are crossed congruently is the Bayesian framework: "Bayesianism provides a unified framework for inference that erodes many commonly emphasized dichotomies in methodological literature" (382). In this sense, Fairfield and Charman are not denying the different ontological nature distinguishing qualitative and quantitative evidence. They suggest, however, that this difference can be epistemologically and methodologically made congruent only through Bayesianism.

9 Beyond distinguishing between uni- and multi-level designs, the SNR literature (Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019) and multilevel research literature (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2003) also differentiate theories by the proposed direction of causality, highlighting *top-down* accounts, where national dynamics shape subnational outcomes, and *bottom-up* accounts, where subnational processes affect national ones. When stressing the territorial co-production of outcomes, SNR scholars further distinguish *horizontal* reciprocity (interactions among subnational units) from *vertical* reciprocity (dynamics across spatial tiers).

that remain internally consistent and analytically robust as researchers move across spatial levels and units of analysis.

A second challenge, emerging from the evidentiary expansion enabled by both MMR and SNR, concerns the *discrimination of information*. These approaches often generate a multiplicity of sources and data types, raising questions not only about relevance, but also about how to adjudicate between competing interpretations. For example, qualitative and quantitative data may point to diverging accounts of the same outcome, just as local historiographies might offer contradictory accounts of a shared political process. While theory and existing literature should guide researchers in identifying relevant information, both MMR and SNR grant scholars greater discretion in selecting, weighing, and reconciling evidence reflecting different representations of social reality. This discretion demands heightened analytical discipline.

Relatedly, a third shared challenge concerns the *validity of the hypotheses* formulated and the inferences drawn. This applies both to the *ex-ante* design of a project and to the conclusions reached *ex-post* (i.e., during and after data collection and analysis). From an ex-ante perspective, MMR researchers should ensure that the research question warrants the integration of case-based and variance-based logics. For SNR scholars, it involves recognizing from the outset that the outcome of interest has a territorial or spatial dimension (even if its precise (in)formal boundaries cannot be fully specified in advance). In other words, ex ante it should be clear that both SNR and MMR are valid approaches to probe the puzzle or the research question at hand.

From an ex-post perspective, this concern for validity entails demonstrating that the claims advanced are adequately substantiated by the assembled evidence and showing that the conclusions are valid within the spatial levels from which that evidence was drawn. Ultimately, the questions we pose, the hypotheses we formulate, and the inferences we reach must be demonstrably grounded or aligned in both the methodological choices and in the spatial setting bounding the contribution.

Shared Mitigation Strategies

MMR and SNR scholars deploy similar strategies to cope with the challenges identified above, a fact that further underscores their complementarities. For instance, to mitigate potential incongruencies—whether methodological or spatial— researchers prioritize *transparency* throughout all stages of the research process. This involves clearly articulating the (in)compatibility of the evidence types being integrated, the spatial levels from which that evidence is drawn, as well as the actors and factors that operate within those spaces. Such transparency does more than facilitate replication; it enables readers to critically assess the internal coherence and credibility of the study's claims. By foregrounding these considerations, scholars can more effectively manage the complexities that arise from combining MMR and SNR, while preserving the analytical strengths of both approaches.

To manage the task of weighing and reconciling copious and at times contradictory evidence, both MMR and SNR studies typically engage in a principled *scrutiny* of available material. This analytic thoroughness often involves triangulating sources, incorporating negative or shadow subnational cases, and critically assessing the credibility of competing accounts. For instance, MMR researchers frequently evaluate the reliability of estimates and qualitative information. For their part, SNR scholars often weigh evidence drawn from one territorial level against that from another—for example, by contrasting local interviews or municipal statistics with data from national or supranational organizations. Paired with transparency, such scrutiny allows readers to grasp not only the type of evidence being used (qualitative vs. quantitative) and its spatial origin (local, provincial, or national), but also the rationale behind how it was weighed, prioritized, and interpreted.

Table 1. Synergies and Challenges of Multi-Method and Subnational Research

		Research Approach		Analytical Praxis	
		MMR	**SNR**	**Challenges**	**Mitigation Strategy**
Dimensions	**Boundary-Crossing**	Philosophical (variance-based vs. case-based)	Spatial (Unilevel vs. Multilevel)	Congruence	Transparency
	Evidentiary Expansion	Intertwining (triangulation-integration)	Diversification (disaggregation - differentiation)	Discrimination	Principled Scrutiny
	Theoretical Enhancement	Added Generative & Probative Value		Validity	Alternative Explanations & Scope conditions

Finally, to ensure that hypotheses and conclusions are valid—both methodologically and spatially—MMR and SNR scholars often address this challenge by systematically *considering alternative explanations* and carefully delineating *scope conditions*. In the case of MMR, researchers explicitly assess how different types of evidence may support competing interpretations and reflect on how the combination of methodological approaches helps refine or update existing understandings of contested phenomena. SNR scholars, in turn, examine *where* a given outcome has been theorised (i.e., within which territorial space) and critically assess whether explanations drawn from one spatial level hold at another, guarding against theory stretching (Giraudy, Moncada, and Snyder 2019) and also against territorial conflation (Pérez Sandoval 2023).

Regarding scope conditions, MMR researchers acknowledge that the strength of their inferences is contingent on the coherence and complementarity of the evidence they integrate. SNR scholars, for their part, tend to be explicit about the spatial and territorial boundaries within which their conclusions apply. Some, for instance, distinguish between different types of territorial scope conditions to clarify the applicability and limits of their findings (Dosek 2023).[10]

Taken together, these dimensions, challenges, and mitigation strategies (summarized in Table 1) illustrate not only the deep methodological affinities between MMR and SNR, but also their mutual potential when used in tandem. While the identified elements may not be exclusive to either approach, their intersection generates a distinctive logic of inquiry—one marked by epistemological openness, spatial sensitivity, and analytical rigor. Recognizing and embracing these complementarities can enhance the quality of empirical research and expand the methodological toolkit available to scholars engaging with complex social phenomena.

SNR and MMR in Action: Three Illustrative Examples

MMR and SNR are complementary strategies of social inquiry that, together, enhance our analytical capacity by increasing our confidence in the arguments and explanations we put forth to unpack and understand social reality. In this section, I draw from three now-classic contributions to briefly illustrate how MMR and SNR have been deployed in tandem, and how they jointly strengthened the cogency and the certainty around the findings of these key scholarly contributions.[11]

10 For example, Dosek (2023) contends that an SNR lens highlight that every theory has two types of territorial scope conditions: (*i*) an inter-level scope condition (ILSC), limiting the ability of theory to travel between different territorial levels; and an (*ii*) within-level scope conditions, which limits the ability of concepts and theories to travel across units of the same level.

11 Since the synergies of MMR and SNR have not previously been theorized explicitly, it is important to acknowledge that the

The first example is Agustina Giraudy's *Democrats and Autocrats* (2015). Published a decade ago by Oxford University Press, the book quickly became a landmark study for its robust and comprehensive examination of subnational regimes across Argentina and Mexico. In this work, Giraudy argues that the survival of subnational authoritarian enclaves—what she terms subnational undemocratic regimes (SURs)—depends on the interplay between national and subnational executives, specifically on their capacity to mobilize fiscal and partisan institutional tools.

Giraudy explicitly embraces MMR to conduct subnational research. This mixed-methods approach is perhaps best exemplified by her strategy to measure subnational democracy, a proxy that enabled her to conduct a pooled comparison of 27 Argentine provinces and 32 Mexican states. This dependent variable integrates quantitative electoral data with qualitative information derived from a meticulous review of journalistic accounts and case-specific evidence, aimed at capturing the extent to which subnational elections were "clean" elections.

In doing so, Giraudy (2015) crossed philosophical boundaries by integrating "objective" and "subjective" measures (i.e., different types of evidence) into a single proxy. This methodological move also enabled her to cross spatial boundaries, effectively pooling all subnational units from both countries in what Sellers (2019) later identified as the analysis of "transnational comparisons." While Giraudy's subnational democracy scores already expanded the evidentiary base available to researchers, the most impressive example of evidentiary amplification comes from her subnational case studies.

When examining Puebla, Oaxaca, San Luis, and La Rioja, Giraudy moves across national and subnational scales while drawing from and deploying a diverse range of evidentiary sources: empirical social science research, national and subnational historiography, journalistic and media reports, documentation from international non-governmental organizations, governmental economic and financial data, and legislative records. In each of the empirical chapters, she triangulates these varied sources, carefully weaving them together to build the evidence underpinning her argument.

Giraudy carefully copes with the challenges identified in the previous section. The book clearly and explicitly reflects on the need for adopting and MMR strategy, and by engaging with O'Donnell's (1993) foundational work, the book carefully unpacks the spatial nature of the dependent variable. The monograph also ensures congruence by being transparent and consistent in conducting a multi-level inquiry: the actors she identifies (i.e., governors) remain consistent between theory and evidence, and across cases analyzed, they have the capacity to exert their agency within the spatial units theorized. Moreover, Giraudy clearly delineates that she is interested in SUR "continuity" (in contrast to SUR origin or SUR change), and importantly, the book openly states that the argument is valid only for second-tier governments (e.g., state or provincial, but nor municipal) in federal and unitary polities.

Beyond setting clear theoretical and spatial scope conditions, the piece thoroughly considers alternative explanations by including them in the regression models as controls and by explicitly reviewing them in the analysis of both the positive and the negative cases. Finally, throughout the analysis the author is careful to scrutinize multiple and contradictory information as exemplified by the copious use of footnotes that enable the reader to assess the validity of the author's own conclusions.

The joint deployment of SNR and MMR enabled Giraudy to innovate theoretically. Moving beyond Gibson's (2012) seminal book, Giraudy (2015) reframed the debate by demonstrating that the survival of subnational authoritarian enclaves is an equifinal outcome. In other words, "boundary-opening" strategies pursued by local opposition forces are not a sufficient condition to explain the persistence (or breakdown) of subnational undemocratic regimes. The explicit multilevel rationale pursued allowed Giraudy to show that

works reviewed embody them implicitly or indirectly rather than self-consciously.

the balance of power shaping intergovernmental relations is not fixed, but rather dynamic. As such, scholars must pay close attention to the agency of national and subnational executives along with their ability to pull on the institutional and political levers at their disposal.

A second example, released roughly five years before the publication of *Democrats and Autocrats* (Giraudy 2015) is Tulia Falleti's Cambridge University Press monograph, *Decentralization and Subnational Politics in Latin America* (2010). Falleti argues that coalitions with different territorial interests shape the type of decentralization reform pursued—whether administrative, political, or fiscal. She further contends that decentralization processes exhibit increasing returns or a first-mover advantage: the type of reform implemented first conditions which reforms follow. Consequently, Falleti argues, the temporal sequence in which decentralization reforms are introduced fundamentally shapes the intergovernmental balance of power.

Methodologically, Falleti (2010) introduces what she calls the "comparative sequential method." Conceptualized as a synthesis of comparative historical analysis (e.g., Mahoney and Thelen 2010) and process tracing (e.g., George and Bennet 2004), this approach emphasizes both "macro-level" historical junctures, and the "micro-level" unfolding of decision-making by individual and collective actors. Embedded throughout the book's four empirical chapters is a careful triangulation of qualitative and quantitative evidence underpinning her analysis of subnational politics. Falleti combines fiscal, educational, and electoral data with information drawn from congressional debates, alongside insights gained from 18 months of fieldwork and over 150 in-depth interviews. In this sense, while not explicitly framed as such, the joint deployment of MMR and SNR in Falleti's work is so seamlessly and congruently executed that it is almost imperceptible.

Falleti (2010) examines her sequential theory of decentralization across Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. Like Giraudy (2015), she constructs an argument in which the actors identified remain consistently theorized and empirically observed across cases, and in each instance, they do in fact have the capacity to exercise agency within the spatial boundaries established by the theoretical framework. This is important because when contrasting cases, Falleti (unlike Giraudy) switches between municipal and state-level boundaries, constantly shifting her attention between mayors, national executives, governors, and other civil society or mass organization. Notably, Falleti (2010) also pays careful attention to ensuring the temporal congruence of the decisions and events she identifies. In other words, alongside her careful unpacking of the spatial dimensions of the dependent variable, she also systematically unpacks the temporal dimension of her outcome of interest.

Like Giraudy (2015), Falleti draws on a wealth of dataset observations (DSOs) and causal-process observations (CPOs) (Brady and Collier 2004), which she scrutinizes with notable rigor. And like Giraudy, she makes frequent use of footnotes to provide auxiliary contextual information and interpretative caveats, enhancing the transparency of her analytical choices. Moreover, to bolster her claims and enable readers to "see for themselves," Falleti includes numerous direct quotations from her interviewees. This commitment to transparency is further exemplified by her extensive use of graphs, tables, and diagrams, which not only summarize complex information but also reinforce the spatial and temporal coherence of her argument.

Finally, Falleti gives ample consideration to alternative explanations, and she also clearly delineates the scope conditions bounding the temporal and spatial validity of her claims. Accordingly, she contends that her theory on sequential decentralization should be expected to hold in post-developmental states (e.g., Woo-Cumings 1999), and that we should anticipate that reform becomes increasingly difficult after a first full cycle of administrative, political, and fiscal decentralization has been implemented. In other words, by combining SNR and MMR with her comparative sequential method, Falleti is able to conclude that decentralization reforms trigger self-reinforcing, path-dependent equilibria.

In sum, a subnational lens, a careful weaving of different types of evidence, and a sharp grasp of how politics unfolds through time (e.g., Pierson 2004), allowed Falleti to innovate theoretically. She

recognized that beyond partisan or ideological preferences, actors have geopolitical, territorial interest. Moreover, against the intuitive and conventional notion that decentralization benefits subnational actors, in her book Falleti (2010) convincingly showed that that is not always the case. Battling coalitions with different territorial interests inside countries activate reactive or self-reinforcing dynamics that have increasing returns.

The third example is Matthew Ingram's *Crafting Courts in New Democracies* (2016), a tour de force in comparative judicial politics. Ingram convincingly shows that subnational judicial reform in Brazil and Mexico has been shaped less by structural or material incentives, and more by the ideas and programmatic commitments of local political actors. Counterintuitively, he demonstrates that politicians from across the ideological spectrum will pursue reform, albeit with different motivations, and this explains why reforms do not always strengthen subnational judiciaries in practice.

Methodologically, just as Falletti and Giraudy's work, Ingram's *Crafting Courts* exemplifies both MMR and SNR. On the quantitative side, Ingram (2016) employs time-series cross-sectional regressions of judicial spending across all Mexican and Brazilian states, capturing broad patterns of variation in institutional strength. On the qualitative side, he conducts six state-level case studies—Aguascalientes, Michoacán, and Hidalgo in Mexico; Acre, Rio Grande do Sul, and Maranhão in Brazil—based on 117 interviews, archival research, and several months of fieldwork. These qualitative cases are deliberately nested within the statistical analysis following Lieberman's (2005, 2015) logic of nested analysis: "typical" and "deviant" cases are selected using "typicality scores" (i.e., the absolute value of regression residuals), ensuring variation and including both positive and negative cases. This careful case selection strategy reflects a strong commitment to methodological transparency and further illustrates the author's effort to bridge variance-based and process-oriented research rationales.

Importantly, Ingram's book displays the three synergies of MMR and SNR. First, boundary-crossing: Ingram (2016) combines variance-based and case-based methods, integrating judicial spending models with process tracing, and simultaneously moves across territorial scales by situating state-level reform in relation to national political dynamics. Second, evidentiary expansion: the study leverages diverse forms of evidence—statistical data, interviews, archives, and fieldwork—while also disaggregating across subnational units, thereby multiplying both the sources and levels of data available for inference and for probing alternative explanations. Third, theoretical enhancement: *Crafting Courts* refines prevailing accounts of judicial reform by showing that partisan ideology matters and that political ideas shape reform trajectories in ways often overlooked by structural or rationalist explanations. The combination of MMR and SNR allows Ingram to specify when and why leftist, centrist, and rightist actors converge or diverge in their commitments to strengthening judicial institutions, delineating clear scope conditions that allow the argument to travel beyond the Mexican and Brazilian experience.

Finally, *Crafting Courts* is also notable for how it confronts shared challenges. Concerns about congruence are addressed through transparent articulation of case selection criteria and explicit integration of quantitative and qualitative findings. Problems of evidentiary discrimination are mitigated through triangulation across interviews, archives, and statistical data. Validity is secured by delineating the scope of claims—for instance, focusing on state-level judiciaries in federal systems and situating findings within broader debates about judicial reform in new democracies. In sum, just like Falleti's and Giraudy's work, Ingram's book is a model of how MMR and SNR can be jointly deployed, implicitly embodying the synergies, challenges, and mitigation strategies highlighted in this article, while offering impactful theoretical insights into the uneven geography of judicial systems in Latin America after the Third Wave of democratization.

Taken together, these three works illustrate how the synergies between MMR and SNR, though often implicit, do substantially strengthen social inquiry. Giraudy (2015) combines cross-national subnational comparisons with multiple streams of evidence to challenge assumptions about authoritarian persistence; Falleti (2010) shows

how sequencing and territorial interests can be uncovered through the careful integration of historical and subnational analysis; and Ingram (2016) reveals how nested designs linking statistical analysis and case studies illuminate the ideational underpinnings of reform across diverse contexts. Each example not only showcases boundary-crossing, evidentiary expansion, and theoretical enhancement, but also highlights how scholars address challenges of congruence, evidentiary reconciliation, and validity through transparent design, triangulation, and explicit scope conditions. Together, they underscore the promise of aligning MMR and SNR as complementary logics of inquiry, capable of producing richer evidence, sharper inferences, and more compelling theories.

Conclusion

Studies employing subnational and mixed-method research have consistently increased over the past three decades. Alongside experimental and quasi-experimental designs (e.g., Cunningham 2021; Druckman and Green 2021), SNR and MMR have helped overcome some of the most cumbersome challenges in building compelling explanations in comparative politics and the social sciences more broadly. While these approaches have often developed independently, I have argued that SNR and MMR share key parallelisms across three dimensions: they (*i*) engage in boundary-crossing, (*ii*) enable evidentiary expansion, and (*iii*) strengthen theory-building and theory-testing analyses. These complementarities are further compounded by shared challenges—such as issues of congruence, evidentiary discrimination, and the spatial and methodological validity of an argument—as well as by the strategies scholars adopt to address them, including analytical transparency, rigorous scrutiny, and clear assessments of alternative explanations and scope conditions. In sum, when deployed in tandem, these two approaches align as complementary logics of social inquiry, enhancing our analytical capacity to unpack sociopolitical reality.

The complementarities, challenges, and strategies identified here are neither exhaustive nor exclusive to subnational and mixed-method research. There are likely other domains in which MMR and SNR align, and the challenges and mitigating strategies listed are certainly used by scholars employing other methodological approaches. In addition, it is also likely that there are incompatible features, or limits to the extent with which MMR and SNR can synergize. Moreover, there are clearly other exemplary contributions that have effectively combined these approaches, including McMann's *Economic Autonomy and Democracy* (2006), Gervasoni's *Hybrid Regimes within Democracies* (2018), and Niedzwiecki's *Uneven Social Policies* (2020). Rather than a drawback, acknowledging these limitations is crucial for developing an agenda that promotes best practices and encourages further cross-fertilization as well as a more disciplined application of these two methodological traditions.

I close by highlighting an implication that echoes Geddes' (2003) pioneering methodological reflections: questions of method and questions around the topics of substantive interest are fundamentally co-constitutive. Although the decision to study subnational phenomena is often framed as driven by data availability or by theoretical criteria, the discussion in this paper suggests that the choice of territorial scale is itself deeply entwined with methodological considerations. In other words, the choice of territorial scale is not analytically neutral; it shapes our inferences and may even necessitate leveraging a plurality of methodological approaches. Scholars should thus view the "where," the "what," and the "how" of their research as mutually constitutive rather than as separate stages of a linear sequence. To paraphrase Geddes (2003), territorial scale and methodological approach configure a two-way street, one in which the scale we choose influences the tools we employ, and these in turn affect the answers we get.

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QMMR Qualitative & Multi-Method Research

Symposium: Emerging Methodologists Workshop

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Emerging Methodologists Workshop Symposium: Introduction

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The discipline of political science asks and answers crucial questions about how people govern and experience governance; how they generate and resolve conflict; and how they act, react, and interact in the political sphere more broadly. As societies evolve, complex new problems emerge that require scholarly attention and solutions. If political science is to produce accurate and actionable findings that can form the basis for policies that successfully address emerging challenges – that is, if the discipline is to remain relevant -- our ranks must include a broad range of scholars with the backgrounds, experiences, expertise, and perspectives that enable them to engage in fundamentally new thinking and theorizing, and to create innovative ways to collect and analyze data (Mitra, Kapiszewsi, Kleinpaste, and Smith 2024). Yet the group of scholars who develop, write on, and teach research methods in our discipline remains remarkably homogeneous (Achen 2014, Shames and Wise 2017, Barnes 2018), at least in part because methodologically talented junior scholars from under-represented groups are not encouraged and actively mentored to enhance existing methods, develop new methods, publish methodological scholarship, or teach methods.

The annual "Emerging Methodologists Workshop-Qualitative and Multi-Method Explanatory Research" (hereafter EMW-QMER, http://sigla.georgetown.domains/emworkshop/) has contributed since 2023 to addressing the discipline's various diversity deficits. In each day-long workshop, six advanced political science graduate students and junior faculty who are based at U.S. institutions, many from under-represented groups, present and receive feedback on a paper focusing on methods for gathering or analyzing qualitative data, and/or strategies for integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, that are aimed at explanation. Each presenter is paired with a "Methods Mentor" who works with and supports them in the months before and after the workshop, with the goal of their papers being submitted to and published in peer-reviewed journals. More broadly,

the EMW-QMER's aims are to strengthen existing scholarly networks, promote new networks, and build an inclusive intellectual qualitative and multi-methods research community.

This symposium introduces the work presented at the third EMW-QMER, which took place on June 22, 2025 at Syracuse University. The workshop marked various inflection points in the EMW-QMER's history. This year's workshop was the first – we hope of many – to be held in tandem with the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research. In addition, after this year's workshop the EMW-QMER will undergo a leadership change: Kapiszewski will step away from the role she has played since co-founding the workshop with Soifer; Soifer will continue at the helm, together with Jennifer Bussell (Associate Professor of Political Science at UC Berkeley).

This year's workshop again featured a wonderful set of scholars and papers. The pieces presented explored a wide range of methodological issues: combining machine-learning algorithms and field research (Qin Huang), integrating thick description through audio responses in survey experiments (Flavia Batista da Silva), using annotation to capture subjectivity in dataset construction (Sarah Dreier with co-author Emily Gade), practical considerations for enumerating a survey eliciting social networks (Elizabeth (Biff) Parker-Magyar, network-based cluster sampling (Mohamed Dhia Hammami), and episode analysis in case study research (Klaudia Wegschaider). Workshop discussion raised a range of interesting questions, and in particular generated valuable advice about how to structure and write – with regard to both content and tone – a persuasive methods paper. Presenters are now revising their papers based on feedback from the workshop and preparing to submit them for peer review.

The workshop has been supported by generous funding from the National Science Foundation's Accountable Institutions and Behavior program. We also thank the American Political Science Association's Qualitative and Multi-Method Research section for its support of this initiative. We also deeply appreciate the intellectual generosity and commitment of the faculty who served as Methods Mentors this year: Charles Crabtree, Daniel de Kadt, Alan Jacobs, Beth Leech, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Staniland.

We encourage advanced political science graduate students and junior faculty based at U.S. institutions who are writing a paper focused specifically on developing, critiquing, challenging, or enhancing a method for gathering or analyzing qualitative data, or a technique for multi-method research, to submit proposals for consideration for presentation in future EMWs. More information on the EMW can be found here: http://sigla.georgetown.domains/emworkshop/

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"Empirical Type:" Towards a Multi-Method Analysis of Classification and Concept Building

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This paper proposes an integrative approach to classification and concept formation termed "empirical type," which combines the pattern identification of quantitative clustering with the theoretical conceptualization of qualitative case studies. Bridging these two distinct methodological cultures, the "empirical type" approach seeks to produce typological results that are both empirically grounded and theoretically meaningful. This approach defines typological analysis through three essential components: case classification that facilitates the construction of categorical variables or sets useful for explanatory analyses (Elman 2005; Fiss 2011; Van Baalen 2024); causal or ontological dimensions that articulate distinctions between categories and aid in identifying causal mechanisms across cases (Goertz 2006; Goertz and Mahoney 2005); and a typological system of concepts that provides meaningful interpretations for complex social realities (Collier, LaPorte, and Seawright 2012).

The social sciences have a long tradition of classifying complex phenomena into coherent concepts and grouping cases into meaningful categories, often encountering methodological crossroads between qualitative and quantitative cultures (Bailey 1994; Collier, LaPorte, and Seawright 2012; Mahoney and Goertz 2006; Marradi 1990). Qualitative typologies, epitomized by Max Weber's "ideal type," typically serve as abstract mental constructs designed to highlight essential characteristics and boundaries of social phenomena or facilitate comparative analysis (Weber 1949). In contrast, quantitative taxonomies employ statistical techniques, such as clustering analysis, to group similar observations into clusters, aiming to maximize within-group similarity and between-group dissimilarity for subsequent analytical use (Ahlquist and Breunig 2012; Bailey 1994; Marradi 1990).

Despite their utility, each method faces significant critiques. Qualitative typologies, especially the Weberian ones, are frequently criticized for their lack of empirical validation and challenges in demonstrating generalizability and replicability (King, Keohane and Verba 1994). Additionally, concerns exist regarding potential researcher biases inherent in typology construction and case categorization (Blalock 1982). Conversely, quantitative clustering methods are often criticized for lacking inherent theoretical grounding and conceptual depth (Collier, LaPorte, and Seawright 2012; Strauss and Corbin 1998). They struggle to explain cluster formation and to contextualize how these clusters might evolve, limiting their acceptance and application in social science research.

To bridge these two cultures of classification, the empirical type approach adopts a sequential and iterative strategy encompassing three phases: scoping, analyzing, and conceptualizing. The process is sequential in that it logically progresses from scope clarification and data collection to quantitative clustering and ultimately the integration of qualitative insights into conceptual frameworks. Simultaneously, the process is inherently iterative, as reflections from each phase feed back into others, enabling continuous refinement of data, analytical methods, and conceptual categories (Goerge and Bennett 2004; Kapiszewski, Maclean and Read 2022; Mahoney 2010; Santi el al., 2021).

An illustrative typological analysis of transitional economies across Chinese provinces demonstrates the practical application of the "empirical type" approach. Combining quantitative clustering and dimensional deduction with case studies drawn

from extensive fieldwork across China, this analysis identifies a system of four distinct transitional economic types, differentiated primarily by varying combinations of state and market influences. In contrast to the "ideal" dichotomy of "state-led" versus "market-led" economies, the four transitional types presented here reveal more complex and dynamic configurations of state-market relations in transitional China.

This study advocates for the use of time-series hierarchical clustering and Uniform Manifold Approximation and Projection (UMAP) in quantitative classification and dimensional deduction. It presents evidence that these advanced machine learning tools outperform traditional techniques in typological and taxonomic analyses. Used together, they enhance the validity of clustering results, provide more robust clustering patterns through richer datasets, and reveal the temporal stability and historical evolution of cluster memberships. In other words, even scholars who are less interested in qualitative conceptualization should recognize the value these tools bring to quantitative analysis.

The "empirical type" approach responds to the demand for historically and contextually grounded concept-building, manifesting in forms such as subtypes, concepts with adjectives, and hybrid concepts (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Collier and Mahoney 1993; Diamond 2002; Gerring 1999; Goertz 2006). Unlike the Weberian ideal type, designed as timeless abstractions, the "empirical type" approach recognizes the necessity for concepts to evolve alongside the phenomena they describe, adapting to varied local contexts where similar phenomena may carry different meanings. Incorporating dynamic data such as time-series datasets and iterative qualitative theorization ensures that the derived typologies capture the continuous dynamism inherent in changing societies and complex systems, such as transitional economies. Transitioning from ideal types to empirical types thus promotes adaptive concept-building suitable for the increasingly empirical and data-driven landscape of social sciences, while respecting the temporal and spatial contingencies of social scientific concepts (Collier and Mahoney 1993; Goertz 2006).

Integrating clustering with case studies also aligns with recent calls for combining quantitative and qualitative methods to enhance inference quality (Humphreys and Jacobs 2023; Seawright 2016). Such a multimethod protocol leverages the complementary strengths of quantitative pattern detection and qualitative theorization, effectively addressing different aspects of deriving typologies from complex social phenomena. Therefore, this integrative and iterative approach surpasses mere methodological "triangulation", which typically validates findings by answering the same questions through multiple methods (Seawright 2016). Furthermore, employing advanced machine-learning algorithms enriches traditional typological analysis, equipping researchers with innovative tools suited to contemporary challenges posed by big data (Brady 2019).

Beyond its direct contributions to typology building, the "empirical type" approach offers broader implications and avenues for future research. This method provides a flexible and iterative framework capable of capturing the diversity and dynamism inherent in social phenomena, especially within comparative and historical research contexts. It facilitates the refinement of concepts, the development of theoretical insights, and the testing of causal mechanisms across diverse social science domains. Future research could fruitfully integrate this approach with additional methods of quantitative causal inference or historical process tracing. Ultimately, empirical type analysis encourages scholars to view typologies as dynamic, evolving tools for comprehending complex realities rather than static classifications.

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Capturing Voices: Comparing Audio and Typed Open-Ended Survey Formats

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Introduction

Typed open-ended responses remain the standard approach for probing how and why people arrive at their survey answers, yet they are not without drawbacks. They can deter participation and pose challenges for respondents with lower literacy or from harder-to-reach groups (Shaghaghi, Bhopal, & Sheikh, 2011; Stoop, 2005; Duvoisin et al., 2024). Collecting audio-recorded responses offers a potential alternative. In contexts where voice messaging is widespread, such as in Latin American countries, speaking may feel easier and more natural than typing, lowering cognitive and literacy demands while encouraging more spontaneous, detailed, and affectively rich answers. This raises an important methodological question: which format—typed or audio—better captures the reasoning behind responses while also supporting data quality and validity?

To address this question, I draw on an original survey mode experiment conducted in Brazil in which respondents were randomly assigned to answer an open-ended question about impeachment either by typing or by recording an audio response. I assess the trade-offs between these formats across five dimensions: (1) response richness, (2) impact on educational gaps in response quality, (3) response rates, (4) time efficiency, and (5) inclusiveness—whether particular respondent groups are systematically excluded.

The findings reveal that audio responses are typically richer, faster to produce, and more engaging, yet they also lead to lower completion rates and widen the quality gap between more and less educated respondents. Overall, each mode offers distinct advantages and disadvantages, suggesting that the optimal choice will depend on the researcher's substantive objectives and the characteristics of the target population.

Literature Review

Recent work in political science has emphasized the value of open-ended data for theory development, mechanism testing, and contextual interpretation (Fischer, 2021; Roberts et al., 2014; Schuman & Presser, 1996). Open-ended questions capture respondents' reasoning, allowing researchers to assess treatment interpretation and uncover unanticipated patterns.

However, most survey experiments rely on typed open-ended responses, which introduce potential measurement error: they require literacy, typing skill, and time, all of which vary across demographic groups (Geer, 1988; Lavrakas, 2008). This can reduce data quality and limit participation—especially among low-education or digitally marginalized populations.

Audio responses may mitigate these concerns. Research in linguistics, psychology, and human-computer interaction suggests that spoken language allows for more spontaneous, affective, and cognitively accessible expression (Sturgis et al., 2015; Dietrich et al., 2019). Yet few studies in political science have systematically compared audio and typed modes in survey experiments.

Design and Results

To test these trade-offs, I conducted a pre-registered survey experiment with over 2,400 Brazilian adults. Respondents were randomly assigned to answer an open-ended question about presidential impeachment either by typing or by recording their answer. I then evaluated how mode

affected outcomes related to quality, efficiency, and inclusiveness.

1. **Response Richness:** Audio responses were significantly longer and more topically diverse than typed ones. Audio respondents produced, on average, responses that were 120% longer and contained nearly one additional topic. This suggests greater elaboration and expressiveness, potentially reducing measurement error and improving detection of mechanisms.
2. **Education-Based Disparities:** Contrary to expectations, audio responses did not reduce the gap in response richness between low- and high-education participants. If anything, the education gap was slightly larger in the audio condition. This suggests that audio may not be a literacy equalizer and that typed responses may still be more equitable when targeting low-literacy populations.
3. **Response Rates and Quality:** Typed responses had a higher completion rate: 97% of participants answered the typed question compared to 82% in the audio condition. However, among those who did respond, audio responses were more likely to be substantive (93% vs. 85%), suggesting a trade-off between quantity and quality.
4. **Time Efficiency:** Audio responses were 33% faster to produce on average, even after accounting for response length and topic diversity. Moreover, audio respondents packed more content per second, demonstrating greater expressive efficiency.
5. **Respondent-Level Variation:** No demographic subgroup—based on education, gender, political knowledge, or age—benefited disproportionately from audio versus typed modes. While certain groups (e.g., more educated, more knowledgeable) gave higher-quality responses overall, this pattern did not differ by mode.

Discussion and Conclusion

These findings have clear implications for survey design in political science. First, when the research goal is to uncover mechanisms or improve measurement of attitudes, audio offers a clear advantage. Richer and more expressive responses help verify whether treatments are understood and how respondents reason through their opinions. In this study, many audio respondents referenced treatment content, expressed strong partisan views, or invoked normative principles—offering insights that may be lost in shorter, typed responses.

Second, audio enhances external validity by capturing how people naturally talk about politics. Especially in oral-dominant settings like Brazil, voice responses reflect everyday discourse and may better represent political reasoning in real-world contexts. They also generate dual data streams—text and voice—that can be leveraged to study emotion, tone, and certainty.

However, researchers must weigh these benefits against potential costs. Audio responses led to lower completion rates and did not reduce disparities in response quality across educational groups. In studies with hard-to-reach or low-literacy populations, typed responses may be more effective at minimizing attrition and maintaining representativeness.

Practically, the choice of mode should be guided by research priorities. If the primary concern is identifying mechanisms or reducing measurement error, audio is a valuable tool. If one instead prioritizes reducing sample bias and ensuring high response rates, typed responses may be more reliable. And if a study targets populations with low digital or educational access, mode selection must be sensitive to those constraints.

In short, there is no universally superior format; only trade-offs. The optimal choice will depend on the researcher's substantive objectives and the characteristics of the target population, making it essential to weigh these trade-offs to design surveys that maximize both data quality and validity.

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Managing Subjectivity and University in Dataset Construction[1]

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Large-*n* observational datasets[2] are essential tools in social science. They allow scholars to systematically study real-world phenomena, identify social patterns, and inform policy. When built attentively, datasets also have the potential to surface and challenge systems of oppression (D'Ignazio and Klein, 2020). However, datasets are not neutral representations of objective facts. They are abstractions—simplified interpretations of complex, often contested realities. In the process of creating datasets, researchers reduce lived human experiences to typologies that permit comparison and generalization. This process inevitably relies on human judgment, interpretation, and cultural framing (Orr and Crawford, 2024). Thus, creating observational datasets always involves "thick description"—extracting and interpretating meaning from observations of complex social behavior (Geertz 1973).

However, researchers often overlook these realities, treating large-*n* datasets as clear-cut, objective representations of social circumstances. Those who generate datasets do not always document their interpretive choices, disagreements, contestations, and/or uncertainties; and even when they do, downstream users often disregard such metadata. Together, these conditions can mislead those who generate and consume knowledge into presuming that datasets reflect unmediated truth and into drawing more definitive conclusions than the real-world phenomena would merit. We join a cohort of scholars in attending to the overlooked subjectivities involved in generating datasets.

Failing to do so has epistemological and practical consequences: researchers risk drawing overly confident conclusions that do not fully or meaningfully reflect the phenomena the data aim to capture. Poor documentation of human judgment can cause real harm. Datasets can reproduce media bias, obscure survivor-reported violence, or suggest false trends due to reporting changes rather than actual variation (Earl et al., 2004; Parkinson, 2023; Shaver et al., 2022; Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013). Misclassification, omission, or over-representation in datasets can shape how issues are understood, who receives resources, and how states intervene.

We identify four stages in which subjectivity shapes dataset construction. First, primary source data is often incomplete and biased (Balcells and Sullivan, 2018). Media-based data, for example, can amplify powerful voices while omitting marginalized perspectives (Dietrich and Eck, 2020; Dreier et al., 2022; Weidmann, 2015). Second, research design decisions—including scope conditions, coding rules, and concept definitions—reflect researchers' pre-existing knowledge, assumptions, and values (Bowker and Star, 2000; Collier and Levitsky, 1997; Eck, 2012; Staniland, 2017). Third, coders apply research design rules with different levels of expertise, knowledge, and lived experiences. Even with clear codebooks, personal backgrounds can shape how coders understand and classify events. Fourth, the resulting dataset often erases or under-

1 We thank Daniel DeKadt, Diana Kapiszewski, Hillel Soifer, and EMW participants for invaluable feedback.

2 Datasets that: were not generated using experimental interventions; draw on primary or secondary sources; are constructed via researcher classification; and are based on (inevitably) incomplete or biased depictions of real-world phenomena that are embedded in social and political contexts.

emphasizes subjective realities, presenting the dataset as more authoritative and coherent than the underlying phenomena merit.

We advocate for adopting explicit "thickly descriptive" data construction practices that document coder judgments and assumptions, uncertainties or ambiguity in source material, contested interpretations, reflexive choices, and other subjectivity the researchers encounter and employ. Such metadata does not necessarily eliminate bias. However, it can help contextualize the data, offering downstream users a more accurate and nuanced view of what the datasets depict. Table 1 outlines several key problems that arise during the construction of observational datasets and presents conceptual strategies and tangible solutions designed to mitigate or confront them.

Table 1: Strategies for managing subjectivity and uncertainty in dataset construction

Problem	Conceptual Strategy	Solution
Primary source data is in complete, contested, and structurally biased due to reporting limitations, missing details, or selective emphasis.	Recognize that primary source data produced amid political events is interpretive and shaped by uncertainty and power asymmetries.	Allow coders to record uncertainty and note incomplete data; avoid forced binary decisions; require minimum search time for a given observation; document judgments.
Coders harbor personal biases, unique experiences, and political perspectives that shape how they classify and interpret events.	Acknowledge coder reflexivity; embed opportunities for reflection throughout the data pipeline.	Document reflexive starting points; provide detailed case context; require field notes; record metadata; anticipate harms that datasets may cause to vulnerable populations.
Coders make assumptions to resolve ambiguity or apply abstract rules to real-world data.	Encourage documentation of assumptions; foster lab culture that recognizes and supports uncertainty.	Support team engagement; conduct regular check-ins; welcome corrections; accommodate diverse learning styles; use flexible coding guides; establish open lines of communication to identify shifts in approach when necessary.
High inter-coder agreement may obscure meaningful disagreements; low agreement may reflect valid, meaningful uncertainty in the underlying data.	Treat disagreement as a source of insight, not error; augment metrics with qualitative reflection.	Recode document subsets; use buddy coding; log disagreements qualitatively; conduct mini ICRs and post-coding audits.
Datasets are often shared without sufficient transparency about coding boundaries, source limitations, or uncertainties.	Make visible the boundaries, assumptions, and positionality baked into the dataset.	Document the evolution of coding ontologies; note strengths and limits of sources and coding approaches; describe known biases and limitations of the dataset.

We also suggest a shift in how researchers conceive of datasets: not as objective repositories of truth, but as acts of collective memory (Ketelaar, 2014; Millar 2006).[3] Each data point is an artifact of social memory shaped by the judgment and politics of its creators. Dataset creators define whose experiences and perspectives are legible and whose are forgotten (Decker, 2013; Merry, 2016). These decisions are shaped by the researchers' social and political contexts and run the risk of legitimizing dominant narratives and silencing marginalized voices (Baer and Sznaider, 2015).

Dataset construction is both empirical work and cultural practice. By explicitly documenting the ways in which researchers *thickly describe* and *remember* social phenomena, dataset users will be better equipped to engage critically with datasets and avoid erroneously treating datasets as objective truths. This framework not only improves rigor and transparency but also helps researchers generate knowledge that more meaningfully reflects real social phenomena while seeking to avoid reinforcing oppressive systems.

3 We developed this framework while building three large-n conflict datasets. A lab culture rooted in inclusion, mentorship, and experiential learning (Bang Jensen et al., 2023; Gade and Wallace, 2023) enabled open discussion, iterative problem-solving, and critical reflection.

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"Should I Get Them for You?" Survey Protocols When Measuring Social Networks[1]

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Scholars increasingly use surveys to elicit social networks to study how those networks influence political outcomes. As this method grows in use, political scientists have relatively few guidelines for effectively designing these surveys, even as the assumptions inherent in network perspectives depart fundamentally the more common variable- or attribute-based survey frameworks (Larson and Lewis 2020).

Building on traditions in other disciplines, Larson and Lewis address this lacuna by surfacing forms of bias common in network measurement and detailing a set of important tradeoffs for researchers designing network surveys, which rely on asking individuals to "recall others to whom they are tied in some way" (Brewer 2000, p. 29, Marsden 1990). Reviewing these biases, the authors point to concerns around *non-response* bias and missingness, which they show can be especially impactful when researchers aim to measure statistics that rely on more comprehensive network information. Another concern is *recall bias*, or the possibility that individuals will present a non-representative sample of their ties. Researchers can also introduce bias through their choices of which individuals and relationship to include in their survey, via what is known as the *boundary specification problem*.

Building on and stepping back from that guidance, this essay turns attention to the choices researchers make when eliciting networks that are distinct from the questions asked on the survey itself. Often referred to as "contextual" factors (Larson & Lewis 2020, p. 128) or discussed in conversation with survey protocols, these choices include the settings and timing in which enumerators meet respondents, which social ties or partnerships enumerators move through to enter a network, how researchers share information about their presence in a community, and how researchers respond to queries about the target population from respondents. These choices are familiar to scholars using randomly-sampled or attribute-based surveys. In those settings, existing best practices often involve recording as much information as possible about these variables, including them in subsequent analyses, and exploring whether they relate to known patterns of social desirability bias (eg McCauley et. al. 2022).

Unfortunately for scholars of social networks, these contextual and protocol choices can pose thornier problems on network surveys. In these surveys based on name-generator questions, researchers are rarely able to predict the direction of social desirability bias in the first place. More broadly, even though scholars usually field network surveys precisely because they theorize respondents influence one another, most of the relevant interactions among respondents are unobserved and confounding is difficult to account for following data collection (Egami 2021). Because observations are not independent, patterns of influence and spillover in survey responses might differ across networks in ways that are theoretically relevant; if we believe that rumors spread more quickly and certain officials are especially influential in some networks, we should also believe these realities influence survey enumeration.

1 For helpful comments on this essay, I thank Richard Nielsen, Janet Lewis, and Charles Crabtree, and participants at the 2025 Emerging Methodologists Workshop at the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research.

When confronting survey design choices, then, researchers should consider the theory they aim to test and their beliefs about how information moves through a network in order to establish a consistent protocol across settings. Beyond these steps, this essay also encourages researchers to acknowledge and record where and how social networks relate to available survey protocol strategies and the likely nature of spillover across respondents. I observed the value of anticipating these choices and then recording these realities while fielding a short, networks-elicitation survey in a set of Jordanian schools and health centers.[2] I enumerated this survey in-person alongside a male research coordinator, following one year of fieldwork during which I conducted approximately one-hundred interviews with Jordanian teachers, health care workers, activists, and policy makers. The primary goal of the survey was to generate data to test of how networks differ across sectors, rather than across or within institutions.

We observed two sets of phenomena that can influence survey responses that would have rarely been at the forefront of standard enumerator trainings. First, while researchers often control many elements of survey timing, location, and privacy, we also observed that the same structural factors that influence social networks can also influence how and where survey teams meet respondents. In our case, differences like architecture, scheduling, and overcrowding tended to isolate healthcare workers while crowding teachers together during their breaks, making it more difficult to reach teachers in private while also likely influencing their relationships with their colleagues. Minimizing cross-sectoral differences in recall required us to take less convenient paths to reach teachers more independently in their primary work-stations; akin to the choices attribute-based surveyors make when seeking privacy protocols while conducting household surveys (Malik and Siddiqui 2024). Moreover, survey timing required us to exclude individuals who rotate across workplaces and truncate the population to respondents present during the workday, analogous to excluding seasonal migrants (Thachil 2018) even though their influence may differ across rural villages. Minimizing concerns around recall bias, boundary specification and non-response across sectors often required making this set of decisions to prioritize consistency over convenience– a set of choices that only flowed from the theoretical goal of comparison across sectors rather than within them.

A second set of phenomena are often downstream of these social ties, relating to patterns of trust, cooperation, and spillover within networks. As in immersive qualitative research, enumerators often only "enter" a unit once, influencing the study regardless of whether the final group of participants is ultimately representative. When coordinating with a development agency, a survey firm, or administrator, researchers must adopt the strong assumption that both their own positionality (Schwedler 2006, Parkinson 2022) and the positionality of that agency, firm, or administrator generate equivalent responses across communities. More generative in our case were respondents' reactions to the collective action problem of survey administration. In both settings, but more frequently in public schools, respondents would ask us if there was anyone we had yet to reach: "Should I go get them for you?" – requiring an explanation of why we would instead reach respondents ourselves. This would be analogous to a respondent offering to text their co-ethnic neighbor to facilitate survey completion in a study of how ethnic diversity influences social outcomes. While researchers should assume that most spillover and coordination is unobservable, they might observe some of these issues by examining patterns of non-response over time, by documenting the questions enumerators receive, or by analyzing how survey responses shift across survey enumeration.

As with questionnaires adopting different theoretical approaches (Thachil 2018, Khoury 2020), these observations highlight how close attention to context can aid researchers in anticipating these tradeoffs and improve the quality of

2 This research received IRB approval from MIT's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Experimental Research, 2101000302.

quantitative data collection, encouraging attention to these protocol and spillover issues during survey development, enumerator training, and piloting. At the same time, the essay highlights how survey enumeration can also provide an opportunity for observation of the network dynamics shaping the outcomes in any analysis. Indeed, observation during survey enumeration can inform researchers' theories of how and why networks operate as they do. From there, encouraging enumerators to record and transparently report observations can allow researchers to better contextualize and understand the data they ultimately collect.

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A Network-Based Approach to Elite Interview

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The Elite Sampling Problem

Elite interview research remains central to political science inquiry, providing insights that other methodologies cannot achieve. The rich, contextual understanding gained through elite interviews has produced foundational contributions to our discipline. Political scientists are increasingly interested in eliciting insights *on* rather than just *from* elites as a politically relevant group, seeking to make broader inferences about elite behavior, attitudes, and preferences. This requires improvements to our existing methodological toolkit, which remains valuable but proves insufficient when researchers aim to draw conclusions about entire elite populations rather than collect information from them about political events and processes. Many challenges arise when trying to infer something about elites as a group because we often lack knowledge of the underlying population characteristics, and existing sampling methods may inadvertently create systematic biases that compromise the validity of group-level inferences. Recent studies examined how elite networks shape war and politics (Bai, Jia and Yang, 2023), influence long-run development through elite control (Ferraz, Finan and Martinez-Bravo, 2020), and affect political transitions in dictatorial regimes (Naidu, Robinson and Young, 2021). Such a research agenda requires representative samples to make valid inferences about elite behavior and preferences. This methodological note presents a network-based sampling protocol that addresses representativeness challenges when making grouplevel inferences.

The challenges facing elite researchers reflect the different nature of elite populations compared to general survey populations. Political actors possess agency in determining research access, which can create selection patterns that differ from those in probability sampling (Breeze, 2021; Ma, Seidl and McNulty, 2021). Existing sampling approaches face particular challenges in certain settings. Purposive sampling can introduce selection patterns based on researcher networks (Tansey, 2009). Snowball sampling (Coleman, 1958) may produce samples concentrated around initial contacts. Respondent-driven sampling (Heckathorn, 1997) may encounter challenges from homophily patterns (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001).

The network-based protocol presented here provides an additional tool for researchers aiming at representative samples to make valid inferences about elite behavior and preferences. This renewed interest in the study of elites as networks (Keller, 2017) creates opportunities for methodological innovations that leverage network insights for sampling design itself.

Three Sources of Potential Sampling Challenges

Elite Access Considerations

Elite participation in research is rarely a neutral decision. Political and organizational actors weigh potential benefits and risks of granting access, considering how participation might affect their reputations, relationships, or ability to shape broader narratives. From their perspective, agreeing to be interviewed can provide opportunities to frame issues in favorable ways, while refusal may limit exposure but protect against misrepresentation.

A further complication arises when access is mediated rather than direct. Facilitators, whether elites who selectively open doors to sympathetic colleagues, or professional fixers and brokers whose networks are shaped by political alignments, may channel scholars toward particular subsets of elites while shielding others, producing samples

that reflect their own strategic choices or structural positions (Breeze, 2021). Because researchers typically cannot observe the counterfactual of who declined or was withheld, they may interpret successful access as evidence of balance, overlooking the patterned exclusions embedded in the process. The methodological consequence is that elite interview samples may represent not the full range of elite perspectives but the intersection of those willing to participate and those whom facilitators allow to be reached.

Researcher–Elite Interaction Patterns

Biases also emerge during researcher-elite interactions. A growing body of work demonstrates that respondents often adjust their answers based on perceived interviewer characteristics, including social identity markers such as gender, race, nationality, or cultural background (Schaeffer, 1980; Corstange, 2016; Gengler, Le and Wittrock, 2021; Blaydes and Gillum, 2013). These dynamics reflect natural tendencies toward rapport-building and impression management, but they can systematically shape the substance of interview responses.

The risk is that researchers interpret fluent or comfortable interactions as indicators of authenticity while failing to recognize that the interview dynamic itself has influenced what was said. This can result in overrepresentation of views that align with interviewer identities and underrepresentation of perspectives that are withheld or reframed in response to perceived differences.

Network Topology Blindness

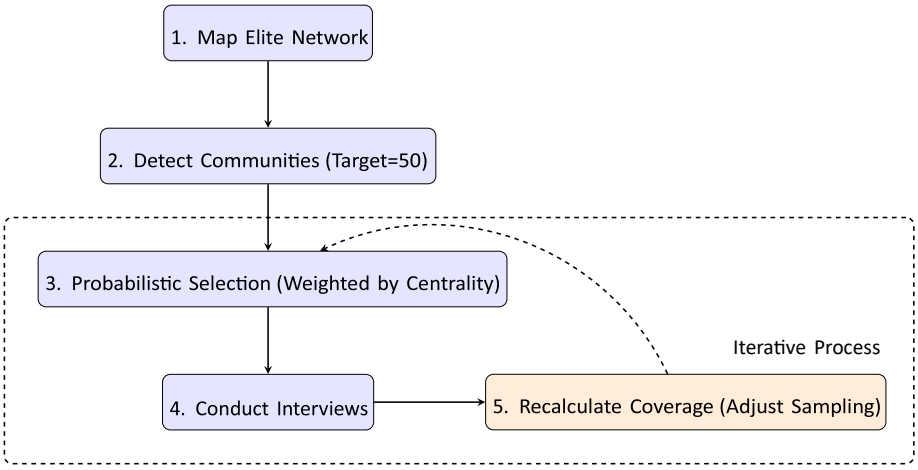
Referral-based methods introduce systematic bias because recruitment depends on existing ties, causing samples to cluster within particular network parts while leaving other regions unexplored (Kirchherr and Charles, 2018; Heckathorn, 1997; Heckathorn and Cameron, 2017). This "topology blindness" prevents researchers from knowing whether respondents occupy mainstream or marginal positions, or whether important segments of the elite population remain inaccessible.

In polarized environments, this limitation can be especially problematic: more interconnected or outward-facing actors are more likely to appear in samples, while insular or factional figures remain underrepresented. The danger is that such samples may appear substantively diverse while in fact privileging specific positions within networks.

A Network-Based Sampling Protocol

This protocol maps network structure before sampling begins, differing from existing network research practices that elicit networks during fieldwork through interviews (Larson and Lewis, 2020, 2017; Klofstad, McClurg and Rolfe, 2009). Rather than asking elites about relationships after securing interviews, researchers using this protocol map network structures before conducting interviews, allowing network topology to inform rather than result from interview selection decisions.

Figure 1: Network-based elite sampling protocol



Step 1: Network Mapping

Researchers construct comprehensive elite network maps using multiple complementary data sources including official registries, social media connections, biographical information, and organizational memberships. The approach accommodates varying data completeness and availability.

Complete network mapping is quasi-impossible in practice; the goal is to uncover overall topology rather than achieve exhaustive coverage. In the absence of a baseline comparable to a population census, researchers can rely on the well-established principle that individuals self-sort into homophilous communities where similar actors cluster together based on shared characteristics (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). This natural homophily means that even incomplete network mapping can reveal fundamental community structure, allowing researchers to identify distinct clusters and ensure representation across different segments without requiring complete population enumeration. Researchers should prioritize mapping connections between communities rather than achieving complete coverage within well-documented groups.

Step 2: Community Detection

The protocol applies community detection algorithms to partition networks into distinct subgroups, creating sampling strata that ensure representation across network regions. This addresses the fundamental limitation of respondent-driven sampling which can only detect community structures after data collection (Heckathorn and Cameron, 2017), or inadvertently miss an important community.

Researchers specify the desired number of communities based on target sample size, as the protocol typically selects fixed numbers of interviewees from each identified community. This parameter requires balancing granularity with practical constraints. Too many communities may create logistical challenges, while too few may obscure important network divisions.

Step 3: Probability-Based Selection

Within each community, researchers implement probability-weighted selection using network centrality measures such as eigenvector centrality (Bonacich, 1987). This prioritizes structurally significant elites while maintaining randomization principles. Unlike traditional approaches where accessible elites self-select into samples, algorithmic selection shifts control to researchers, guided by network position rather than willingness to participate.

The protocol includes structured replacement mechanisms to address non-response through centrality similarity matching. This prevents elite actors from manipulating researcher sampling through selective accessibility while maintaining representativeness across identified communities.

Conclusion

This methodological note introduces a network-based sampling protocol that I am applying in my ongoing dissertation field research on elite survival to regime change. By mapping networks prior to fieldwork, detecting communities, and selecting respondents probabilistically based on centrality, the approach improves representativeness while complementing existing methods such as purposive, snowball, and respondent-driven sampling. While developed with politically-relevant elites in mind, this protocol has broader utility for any research community characterized by dense interconnections and strategic participation dynamics—from business leaders to policy networks to activist coalitions.

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Episode Analysis in Qualitative Historical Political Science

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Introduction

A key strength of qualitative historical political science is that it can create a window into the past as seen through the eyes of its contemporaries. The methodological literature refers to this historically minded approach as reading history forward (Ahmed 2010; Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010; Møller 2021). To create this rich glimpse into the past, scholars offer narrative accounts which often focus on key episodes. These within-case episodes capture not only moments of change (Sewell 1996), but also moments when change was almost reached (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007), and even moments when attempts at change flat-out failed (Issar and Dilling 2022). Fifteen years ago, Capoccia and Ziblatt (2010) stressed the value of episode analysis as a methodological approach and called for more research within this tradition.

My aim is to take stock of the existing guidance on episode analysis, review how scholars have applied episode analysis so far, and highlight areas for further improvement. In this synopsis, I argue for a more explicit application of episode analysis. While a section on case selection has become standard in case study research, there is often little discussion of how the moments of focus *within* the case study were chosen. Specifically, I argue for transparency regarding episode definition, episode selection, and source material across episodes. The overall aim is to render the decisions that scholars are already taking more visible.

What Is An Episode and What Is It Good For?

Episode analysis involves sectioning a case into temporally bounded containers that focus analytical attention. Accordingly, episodes are containers nested within a case study. They are neither cases themselves nor units of analysis; instead, they are windows within a case through which the units of analysis are observed. Episodes may be far apart temporally or follow one another closely. Unlike periods, they are usually not necessarily contiguous. While the term *episode* is rooted in the historical institutionalism literature (Barrenechea, Gibson, and Terrie 2016; Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; Caraway 2004), a similar concept is discussed under the label of *event* in the comparative historical analysis literature (Falleti and Mahoney 2015; Kreuzer 2023)o que conecta a una sucesión de eventos con temporalidad —ya sea de orden o de velocidad— relevante a un resultado de interés (en secuencias que llamamos estrictamente temporales.

An episode adds value *not* because it is necessarily causally important for the eventual outcome, but because it provides an opportunity for observation embedded in context. Observing an actor across two (or more) episodes—mindful of both the changes to the actor and the context—yields a deeper understanding than only observing the actor during one episode. For example, when proportional representation emerged in the 1870s, it was originally a system that strengthened candidates over parties. By the early 1900s, proposals for proportional representation started to take the form of party-list-based systems, thereby granting parties more power over candidates. Along with this change in the perception of proportional representation, there was a shift in the profile of its supporters (Carella and Wegschaider

2024). To capture this shift, it is necessary to see how proportional representation was perceived at different points in time and, as a result, how actors flipped their positions accordingly. The coverage of earlier episodes thus elucidates how the expected impact of proportional representation on intra-party power balance shaped how different actors positioned themselves on electoral system reform.

A case study is more than the sum of its episodes. Episodes do not just form a chronological "and then" story. Instead, they lend analytical structure to a narrative case study. As analytical containers, episodes embed causal process observations in their respective context. Many contextual variables remain constant across a case, but some that matter vary. For example, the constitutional process of introducing a reform may be consistent across episodes, but the party landscape may change. Episodes help effectively communicate these changes over time, making case studies more legible to an audience unfamiliar with the particular case.

Explicit Episode Analysis

Existing empirical work is often vague about how episodes are delineated within a research project. This is a problem because episode selection has crucial implications for the analysis. First, what triggers a researcher to treat a specific period as an episode? Second, what are the boundaries to each episode? Third, how are the episodes identified? Though listed here in order, these questions involve a back-and-forth at the early stages of a research project. Usually, there is not one right answer. But whichever answer is chosen, it must be clear to readers as these choices impact the scope and depth of the research.

Once an episode has been identified, its start and end points must also be specified. As Büthe (2002) noted, determining the boundaries of a historical narrative is not trivial. Not all episodes will have a comparable origin, and the approach should make room for that. Resource constraints may prevent a researcher from following a reform from its first conception as an idea to its eventual adoption. Yet, where this is feasible in terms of resources and data availability, the depth of the work will benefit from covering the full run of each episode, beyond the publicly visible stages.

While scholars already note key contextual changes across episodes in the case narratives, there is room for a more explicit discussion of variation/consistency in the source material across episodes. Variation in the type of sources changes what type of evidence one is likely to encounter. But even if the type of source remains the same, there may be highly influential sources that cover only one or two of the episodes of interest. For example, a detailed diary may be an influential source for one episode but unavailable for another. If an imbalance in the source material exists, researchers ought to reflect on the potential implications for the findings.

Conclusion

Qualitative political science has a long tradition of working with historical case studies. Episode analysis provides analytical structure that focuses the attention of the researcher and reader on key moments. I argue that, in future, this approach should be more explicitly applied. I encourage scholars to clearly state how they define an episode, how they select episodes within the case, how they delineate episode boundaries within the case, and what source material was available across episodes. These recommendations for episode analysis are not meant to be exhaustive; they represent a starting point toward more transparent episode analysis.

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Notes from the Field

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Like a CCTV in an Informal Migrant Camp: Rethinking Research While Building Trust in the Field

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Introduction

I had been a regular guest in their home for weeks—drinking *ataya*, sharing dinner from a communal bowl, and talking at length about their life stories. This group of Gambian men was the first with whom I truly felt I had built a relationship of trust and partnership for my research. That was why, that evening, I snapped to attention when Sanna, a regular at our dinners, suddenly said, "Hey, do you know what my nickname for you is? CCTV! Ahahah! Yes, surveillance camera," he exclaimed, widening his eyes and tapping his temple with his forefinger. "Because you record everything."

Although his words suggested he might not trust me after all, he didn't seem angry. In fact, he looked like he was having fun. The others sitting in the room seemed equally amused, bursting into loud laughter. Sanna, with his long experience as a street squeegee worker, was a captivating performer. Cherif—the person who had introduced me to the group and supported me most during those weeks—chuckled quietly in the corner as he arranged the dirty pots left on the gas burner, mindfully keeping his dreadlocks out of the way. I relaxed and joined in the joke, pretending to stare at each of them one by one, jotting down imaginary notes in my notebook.

That was my last night in the camp before taking a break after months of slowly being accepted—shedding suspicions that I might be an undercover tabloid journalist or an immigration officer—and being welcomed at last to interview dwellers for my study. That we could now joke about those initial fears signaled that our relationship had evolved a step further.

This episode is drawn from my field notes from May 2017, at the height of the European migration crisis and during one of the most intense phases of my PhD fieldwork. My dissertation (Cremaschi 2020) and current book project aim to explain how informal organizational infrastructures that enable migrant labor exploitation emerge in advanced liberal democracies, and why migrants often participate in these underground institutions rather than collectively mobilizing against them. I address these questions through a multi-method study based on ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and original surveys conducted across eight informal migrant camps in Italy between 2015 and 2017.

The evidence and theory I developed emerged through a long and evolving fieldwork process, during which I progressively built rapport with a large number of migrant workers living in extreme conditions. They eventually welcomed me into

their homes to share their stories. At several moments, I had to pause and fundamentally rethink my approach—eventually transforming from a researcher trained exclusively in quantitative (quasi-)experimental methods to one combining approaches and relying heavily on interpretive, participatory fieldwork. This article revisits that process, illustrating how reflecting on the challenges of building trust in spaces closed to white-European outsiders prompted me to reshape both my methodology and the very questions I was set on pursuing.

Studying Informal Migrant Camps in Italy

The house where I spent time with Sanna, Cherif, and their friends was a makeshift dwelling—a few dozen square meters assembled from wooden beams, cardboard, and plastic sheets—located in an informal labor camp near the rural settlement of Borgo Mezzanone in Puglia. The camp, playfully dubbed "Mexico" by its dwellers, housed several hundred people living along a three-kilometer stretch of an abandoned military airstrip. Since then, it has grown into a settlement of thousands. Most residents are West African men employed in the surrounding tomato fields without formal contracts, paid by the piece at exploitative rates, and recruited through an illegal brokerage system.

Camps similar to Mexico are a common—if often overlooked—feature of Western democracies tied to export-oriented agriculture; a domestic byproduct of global value chains in major immigration countries (Mosley and Singer 2015; Peters 2017). In Spain, Moroccan farm workers near Almería live in shacks known locally as *chabolas*; in Greece, Bangladeshi migrants sleep in makeshift shelters near Manolada; and in California, Mexican farmworkers inhabit hidden camps tucked between orchards and irrigation canals (Holmes 2013; Corrado, de Castro, and Perrotta 2016).

In Italy, these camps—referred to as *ghetti by West African migrants*—began in the 1980s as temporary harvest encampments. Over time, they evolved into permanent shantytowns, scattered across intensive farming areas and home to thousands year-round. These settlements lack basic services such as running water, electricity, and garbage collection. Isolated from urban centers and hidden in abandoned rural areas, they are rarely visited by outsiders—including the police and other state authorities.

Amid state neglect, migrants have built informal institutions that sustain collective life. A bustling camp economy, run by dweller-entrepreneurs, supplies food, carpentry materials, battered second-hand cars, and essential services such as hot water, phone charging, and barbers offering fades and shaves. A vibrant nightlife has also emerged, with bars, Afrobeats music, and sex work offered in shacks serving as nightclubs. The *caporali*—migrant brokers living in the camp—recruit, transport, and supervise teams of workers for nearby farms. Alongside them, informal governing bodies—typically led by national community representatives—manage public goods like garbage collection, electricity supply, and road repairs. These are funded through "taxes" collected from the camp's informal businesses and enforced by a self-organized police force that maintains order and implements community rules.

The parallel societies migrants establish in these camps play a dual role: they enable exploitation while also offering a foundation for survival and a space to restore dignity on migrants' own terms. While political science research on migrant exploitation has largely focused on coercion by traffickers and labor racketeers (Boucher 2023; Dipoppa 2024), I show how large-scale exploitation can endure through non-coercive organizational structures—emerging from the individual strategies and collective interactions of migrants as they navigate restrictive immigration policies and societal exclusion (Dancygier and Laitin 2014; Fouka 2019). Drawing on insights from studies of extra-legal governance and informality in low- and middle-income countries (Barnes 2017; Holland 2017; Lessing 2021; Hummel 2021; Grossman 2021) and applying them to research on migrant decision-making and integration in wealthy democracies (Belloni 2019; Mossaad et al. 2020; Ferwerda, Marbach, and Hangartner 2024; Pool 2025), I argue that these informal institutions offer an alternative life path to migrants who are pressured to integrate but systematically denied the means to do so.

Getting in as a Radio Activist

My fieldwork began in 2015, driven less by a clear research question than by curiosity about migrant informality—and growing frustration with the limits of off-the-shelf data. After a first PhD year spent chasing causally identified, quantitative research ideas, each attempt crashed against the wall of inadequate data. That summer, I learned about a large informal migrant camp in Puglia, where a group of activists ran a community radio project to raise awareness about labor exploitation. Encouraged by my supervisor—and spurred by a sudden breakup that left my summer plans wide open—I decided to join.[1]

The project, Radio Ghetto, struck me as a unique entry point into a world I was just beginning to discover. It operated during the peak of the tomato harvest season in Gran Ghetto, a camp of approximately 1,500 residents near Foggia. Volunteers lived in a self-built shack, sharing camp dwellers' conditions. Each day, they co-produced radio broadcasts with migrant workers: playing music, recording stories, and discussing labor conditions. Before long, I found myself jumping off the train at Foggia station, and scanning the parking lot for Marco, my contact from the radio group.

That first drive from Foggia to Gran Ghetto took about 20 minutes across flat tomato fields dotted with wind turbines and the occasional plume of smoke. There were no signs; drivers familiar with the route—like Marco and the packed cars and vans of farm workers passing by—navigated by irrigation hubs. As we neared the camp, the road gradually worsened—potholes multiplied and driving slowed to a crawl.

From the entrance, Gran Ghetto was bustling. It was late afternoon and workers returned from the fields, caked in mud, while others gathered as the bars and restaurants opened for the evening. Cars and vans clogged the main street, horns blaring and drivers shouting greetings or curses. Dioup grilled meat on a sheet of metal beneath sheep heads strung from the roof of his shack, one of the camp's busiest shops. The air was thick with a pungent mix of cooking smoke, rotting garbage, and the stench of human waste—signs of the camp's lack of basic sanitation. The initial shock gradually faded as I adjusted to daily life there.

Besides the small group running the radio, there was no other continuous white presence inside the camp. A medical NGO conducted visits just outside its borders, and another group of volunteers ran an Italian language school in a nearby olive grove—but both were present only a few hours a day. In general, white visitors were closely scrutinized, routinely questioned about the purpose of their visit, and often politely but firmly encouraged to leave. Suspicion toward the radio remained, but its respectful approach had earned the trust of many.

Joining the radio proved essential not just for being allowed to stay, but for learning how to navigate the camp with care. On my arrival, Marco instructed me to always greet anyone I encountered. I carried this advice throughout my fieldwork and was later told by interviewees that walking through the camp with my head up and smiling at those I met helped convey a sense of trustworthiness. From day one, the radio immersed me in the rhythms of camp life and gave me countless opportunities to observe, listen, and plant the seeds of a research approach I would only come to fully embrace much later. At the time, though, I was still holding on to the idea that I could apply a familiar, controlled approach to this highly unfamiliar setting.

Trying to Move Further as a Field-Experimentalist

The research questions that came to mind during my first trip were mostly framed in ways that could be investigated through behavioral experiments. I was particularly struck by informal sanctioning of some camp dwellers I had befriended, as they were angrily scolded for engaging too closely with me and members of the radio project. One episode stuck with me: a 19-year-old—born in Italy to Guinean parents—was harshly told off by an older man for

1 Suddenly preparing for fieldwork without formal training was, as you can imagine, stressful. What helped ease the anxiety—coincidentally—was spending the few weeks I had carefully studying a syllabus by Elizabeth J. Wood (2013), whose *Notes from the Classroom* appear alongside this article in this volume.

speaking to us in fluent Italian. I began to wonder whether this reflected social norms discouraging integration into broader Italian society. Back at my institution, I designed a lab-in-the-field experiment to explore this hypothesis.

I returned the next summer with what I believed was a strong fieldwork plan and a promising research design. I had planned to stay for two months: two weeks volunteering with the radio, then a month and a half on my own, moving between Gran Ghetto and smaller camps further south in Basilicata. Expanding to new camps would let me recruit unacquainted participants and pilot the game before a full implementation. I joined the NGO Medici Per i Diritti Umani (Doctors for Human Rights or MEDU), which conducted daily visits to the news camps, supporting their data collection on migrant workers' living conditions. As in Gran Ghetto, entering through an organization with established relationships in the camps allowed me to meet residents quickly and learn how to best navigate the setting.

It took just over a month to realize the flaws in my experimentalist plan. Running an experiment at that stage of fieldwork, and with that approach, was ill-conceived. Many aspects of the experimental design generated distrust for reasons I hadn't anticipated. One example among many: I wanted to take photos of some participants—thinking this would be unproblematic for documented residents—but it was widely interpreted as a sign I intended to use witchcraft on them.

I also underestimated the time and care required to build trust. In retrospect, the sanctioning I had observed during my first trip may have stemmed not from a norm about integration, but from limited trust in me and what I represented. Most importantly, I began to realize how little I truly understood of the context I had set out to study—and how disconnected my initial question felt from the constrained and precarious life circumstances shaping migrants' decisions.

I abandoned my original plans. After two years drawn into ethnographic readings and increasingly persuaded by the promise of immersive fieldwork, I chose to step back and formulate new questions—ones I could explore through an ethnographic design and that were better aligned with the reality I was getting to know.

Rethinking My Research as an Ethnographer

In searching for new research questions, I focused on behavioral patterns that surprised me and remained hard to explain. Two "puzzles" stood out. First, while the media and politicians often portrayed camp dwellers as trapped by labor brokers, many found jobs independently. Those who relied on brokers actively compared offers and made careful choices. Second, although most said they would leave the camps immediately if not for harvest jobs, a significant number remained even when no work was available. The dwellers I spoke with described these long-term stayers as people who had "given up" on integrating into mainstream society, often contrasting them with their own efforts to move between harvests and precarious arrangements outside the camps.

These diverging strategies offered an analytical foothold for understanding how informal camps function and how labor exploitation is sustained through their organizational infrastructure. I reframed my dissertation around these questions and developed a qualitative research design targeting different groups of interviewees. But doing so meant confronting challenges of access and trust I had only begun to grasp.

While joining Radio Ghetto and MEDU had greatly helped in initial phases, I was beginning to feel constrained by these affiliations. In Gran Ghetto, my ties to the radio meant I mostly interacted with supporters of the project—a selective group of newer dwellers, often with fewer internal connections and more positive experiences with Italians. I had yet to meet a single long-term dweller—the very group central to my second research question. These residents seemed the least open to outsiders. I also realized that my association with outside organizations limited my access to many areas of the camp and the interactions that occurred there. I spent most of my time in public areas—bars and restaurants—rarely entering people's homes. Finally, my role was often misunderstood. Even though I carefully explained that I was now conducting research, many still associated me with my earlier role as a volunteer. This ambiguity sometimes led

to disappointment or mistrust once my actual purpose became clear.

To address these tensions, I resolved to return alone in winter, when agricultural work ceased and only long-term residents remained. I planned to build my own shack, hoping this would clarify my identity from the outset and enable closer interaction with year-round dwellers. Yet, as I had already begun to learn—and as often happens in fieldwork—things did not go as planned.

Building Trust

The day I was set to begin the final phase of my fieldwork coincided with the mass eviction of Gran Ghetto. At dawn, armored police vehicles and buses lined at the camp's entrance. Authorities offered the 500 wintering dwellers transport to two temporary reception centers. Most refused and instead marched 18 kilometers to Foggia to protest at city hall. That night, a fire broke out in the camp, killing two workers that were sleeping in their shack.

I arrived that evening. Flames still licked the camp as bulldozers moved in, flattening the remaining shacks into heaps of cardboard, plastic, and sheet metal. That I would no longer be able to build a shack and build trust as planned felt highly irrelevant next to the trauma unfolding. Many evictees refused the government buses, instead scattering through the countryside or huddling in the few remaining buildings at the camp's edge. In the days that followed, word spread that a small camp—known to some as Mexico—was beginning to take shape as the new Gran Ghetto.

I redirected my fieldwork toward following the displaced as they rebuilt their lives. I helped a few people I knew relocate to Mexico. In parallel, I visited those who had remained living in Gran Ghetto's ruins and others who had moved to government centers. Over time, I became part of the displaced community. Nearly three years into the project, new people I had connected with began agreeing to interviews—and, in time, even those who had long declined started accepting to be recorded. It hadn't gone as planned, but I had finally connected with long-term dwellers and earned a measure of the trust I was after.

In this new phase of fieldwork, I came to fully appreciate how much small, spontaneous acts shaped how people perceived me and my research. These moments often involved sharing in the daily hardship of camp life. Helping with relocations—offering rides from Gran Ghetto to Mexico—naturally fostered new connections. A few days after the eviction, I cooked dinner on my birthday in the shack where some evictees had resettled. For most, it was the first time in many years in Italy that they had been invited to celebrate the birthday of someone Italian. Joining communal dinners and eating with my hands from the shared bowl unexpectedly earned me trust and sympathy, even from the most skeptical.

What Trust Can Teach About Field Research

As Duneier (1999, 338) notes, participant observers should not expect to earn the "full trust" of those they study. Valuable insights often come simply from being present in the field and observing interactions relevant to one's questions. In my case, I spent long stretches in Gran Ghetto and Mexico without gaining much trust from many. Yet that presence itself—and the lack of trust it sometimes revealed—proved deeply informative.

Four years after my fieldwork ended, I returned to Mexico to share my dissertation findings with those who had been closest to me during the research. When I arrived at Cherif's shack—where the story that opened this article took place—he greeted me by shouting and jokingly calling me a "*Carabiniere*!"—Italy's military police. He still remembered how many had warned him about the risks of engaging with me. For him, it was a moment of laughter; for me, a reminder that every piece of information I had gathered was shaped by participants' fear of potential legal or social repercussions. I interpreted each account with that awareness, reflecting not only on what was shared, but also on who shared it and the relationship we had built. Reflexive attention to positionality—a hallmark of political ethnography (Schatz 2009; Wedeen 2010)—can help researchers gain insights even where trust is partial or withheld.

While "full trust" may not be necessary, I have tried to show how efforts to expand the *scope* and *depth* of trust with research participants may be crucial for gathering deeper evidence at different stages of fieldwork.[2] As Pachirat (2017, 102) reminds us, "there is no single moment of access, just lots of moments of access." Many of the moments I've described above were exactly that: steps in a longer process of building and deepening relationships to uncover new layers of evidence. These efforts proved essential not only for participant observation but also for advancing the broader multi-method project I developed. Conducting interviews with former camp-dwellers across Italy and coordinating a large-scale survey across eight major camps were each new moments of access—each requiring trust to be built again.

Reflecting on trust—and its barriers—is crucial not only for ensuring data quality and capturing its nuances but can also redirect an entire research project. In my case, asking why I struggled to build rapport early on led me to embrace ethnography and reframe my questions. I moved away from a plan shaped in the library and followed the leads offered by the field. The result was an exciting book project I could not have envisioned at the start of my PhD—and a research approach that now anchors my work as a mixed-method scholar (Cremaschi and Masullo 2024; Cremaschi, Bariletto, and Vries 2025).

2 I find it useful to think about trust in the field through Gambetta's (1988) idea of trust as an expectation. *Scope* refers to the different areas where a participant might expect you to be trustworthy—like not taking unauthorized photos, not sharing private stories, or not reporting illicit activity. *Depth* is how much trust they place in you in each of those areas.

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QMMR Qualitative & Multi-Method Research

Notes from the Classroom

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Reflections on Teaching the Qualitative Field Research Class at Yale

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Introduction

Every year, fifteen to twenty students take our doctoral-level course on qualitative field research (QFR). Most participants are doctoral students in political science; some are doctoral students in sociology and occasionally in history and various interdisciplinary master and doctoral programs; a few are very committed undergraduate students. The course has been offered every year (with one or two exceptions) since 2006. Students are drawn from all subfields: Comparative Politics, American Politics, International Relations, Political Theory, and Political Economy.

Of the students who are currently in the third through sixth year of our program (and have therefore generally finished their coursework), 48% took QFR.

In 2009, the course was integrated into a new doctoral comprehensive field,[1] "Qualitative and Archival Methods."[2] To our knowledge, Yale remains the only department that offers a doctoral comprehensive field in these methods. At present, the field includes QFR and four other courses: Philosophy of Science for the Study of Politics, Mixed Methods Research, Historical Approaches to the Study of Politics, and Micro-historical Analysis in Social Science Research. The field is structured similarly to other methods fields in our department, except that we emphasize certification by coursework rather than by exam, which reflects our pedagogical conviction that these methods are best learnt through practice. To certify, students are required to take three of the five QAM courses and to write a qualifying paper in one of them. Nearly all of our doctoral students who certify in the field take QFR.

Of students currently in their third to sixth year of the program, 30% qualified in QAM as one of their three required doctoral comprehensive fields.

In this brief note, we reflect on our experience teaching QFR, which remains the flagship course of our unique Qualitative and Archival Methods field.

General Outline

This course centers on the core ethnographic techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviewing, offering students both theoretical

1 In US doctoral programs, students are required to "certify" in some combination of substantive fields of study and methodological fields (e.g., Quantitative Methods, Formal Theory, and—in Yale's case—Qualitative and Archival Methods) by taking courses or passing exams.

2 See the Fall 2015 issue of QMMR's newsletter and the department's web page for more details.

grounding and hands-on experience in immersive qualitative research. Over the semester, we explore fundamental questions such as: What kinds of research questions are best suited to ethnographic methods? How should we understand the relationship between theory and ethnography? What role should research design play in qualitative inquiry? How should qualitative methods–and which ones–best be combined for descriptive and causal inference to address a particular research question?

The course covers key topics in the practice of fieldwork, including research ethics, selecting a field site, writing effective fieldnotes, and analyzing qualitative evidence. The class includes a mix of classroom and, crucially, practical field experience. In the classroom, students engage with powerful examples of ethnographic research, reflecting on epistemological and theoretical debates, and developing an understanding of ethical challenges and research design in qualitative work. We also discuss how to write field notes, conduct interviews, collect oral histories, and engage in participant observation, among other practical topics.

Yet, the cornerstone of the class is fieldwork: All students design and carry out their own qualitative field research projects on topics of their choice. These projects must be based in sites that are accessible from New Haven, and students are generally required to select field sites beyond the Yale community. This independent research component allows students to apply the methods and insights gained over the semester to real-world settings, deepening their understanding of ethnographic inquiry through direct experience.

Training in Basic Methods of Fieldwork

In our classroom sessions, one focus is on exposure to the basic techniques and methods of fieldwork. These include research ethics, selecting field sites, writing fieldnotes, interviews, oral histories, and participant observations.

A distinctive feature of the seminar is an early session in which participants from the previous year return to share their experiences. They present their initial research proposals, Institutional Review Board (IRB) applications, fieldnotes, interview transcripts (scrubbed of all identifying or sensitive information), and final papers. During the Q&A session, they reflect on the lessons they learned about fieldwork, discussing ethics, methodological choices, empirical techniques, and writing.

We also devote a full session to ethical issues. We begin with IRB protocols, proceed to the APSA principles of ethical research, including respect for autonomy, minimizing harm, and ensuring transparency, and examine recent debates on qualitative transparency (Jacobs et al. 2021). We also explore questions of researcher positionality and responsibilities in the field, including what it means to "give back" to the communities we study. In recent semesters, we have discussed the controversy surrounding Alice Goffman's (2014) ethnography through Pachirat's (2017) analysis, which invites broader reflection on the politics and ethics of immersive fieldwork. Throughout the semester, we discuss ethical issues as they arise in the participants' projects and in the classic texts we read together.

The course also draws on a range of methodological texts that address specific techniques. We teach course sessions on interviewing (Fujii 2017; Lareau 2021; Mosley 2013), writing fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011), oral histories, and participant observation, as well as broader works on political fieldwork and ethnography (Driscoll 2021; Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2015; Krause and Szekely 2020; Pachirat 2017; Schatz 2009). Often, these sessions are accompanied by assignments in students' practical fieldwork projects in which they first read about a technique and then are asked to practice its use in the field. (We discuss this more below.)

Reading and Assessing Contemporary Work

Another important element of the seminar is the close reading and discussion of exemplary immersive qualitative field research. There is no single required companion textbook. Over the years, readings have included work by sociologists such as Michael Burawoy (1998), Mitch Duneier (1999), Loïc Wacquant (2022), Alice Goffman

(2014), Matthew Desmond (2016), and Shamus Khan (2011), as well as anthropologists like Clifford Geertz (1973), Teo Ballvé (2020), Philippe Bourgois (1995), and Kimberly Theidon (2013). Readings also span the subfields of political science, showcasing the potential of immersive qualitative fieldwork across American politics (e.g., Richard Fenno 1978, Katherine Cramer 2016, Stephanie Ternullo 2024), comparative politics (e.g., James Scott 1985, Lisa Wedeen 1999, Diana Fu 2018, Iza Ding 2022, Nicholas Rush Smith 2019), international relations (e.g., Séverine Autesserre 2014, Anastasia Shesterinina 2021), and political theory (e.g., Bernardo Zacka 2017, Yuna Blajer de la Garza 2019). As students from all subfields of political science join the seminar, we make an effort to incorporate their substantive interests into our methodological discussions.

A highlight of the seminar is a series of extended Q&A sessions with authors of recently published ethnographic research. In the past five years, we have hosted scholars such as Stephanie Ternullo (2024), Nicholas Barnes (2025), Nicholas Rush Smith (2019), Iza Ding (2022), Diana Fu (2018), Ezequiel González-Ocantos (2016). Reading their books—final products of immersive fieldwork—and then speaking with them about the practical and methodological challenges behind the scenes is consistently cited in course evaluations as one of the seminar's most valuable aspects. We also bring in our own fieldwork-based research for in-depth classroom discussion, openly sharing details about methods, limitations, dilemmas, and trade-offs (Wood 2003, 2006; Mattingly 2019, Lazarev 2023).

In some years, the course also includes a dedicated session on epistemology, in which we engage with both positivist and interpretivist approaches to ethnography, as well as perspectives that move beyond this binary (Allina-Pisano 2009; Burawoy 1991; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013; Wedeen 2010). In the session on theory, we compare the extended case method, grounded theory, and abductive theorizing, and consider the role of concepts in structuring fieldwork.

The Field Research Project

The research component of the class begins with the formulation of a research question and a brief outline of a potential field site. Students often propose multiple project ideas or pivot from their original plans to new topics. This flexibility teaches one of the most fundamental lessons of field research: projects frequently evolve in unexpected ways. Some projects lead to nowhere, the field does not open, or the scholar develops a more intriguing and theoretically fruitful angle to study a problem.

Next, students develop a more detailed fieldwork plan alongside an informal or formal IRB application. This research proposal includes a clear statement of the research question, justification for the chosen field site(s), a description of the methods to be used (including recruitment strategies, informed consent procedures, and data security protocols), an assessment of potential risks and benefits to participants, and, if applicable, preliminary hypotheses. While the expectation is that the results of these projects will remain within the classroom, the instructor reviews each proposal for ethical soundness. If a student plans to publish their work or include it in a dissertation, the project involves vulnerable populations (e.g., minors or incarcerated individuals), or it poses more than "minimal risk" to participants, a formal IRB review is required.

Once the project is approved, students spend significant time in the field during the semester. They are expected to conduct ethnographic observation (and, where appropriate, participate in the field setting) for at least two to three hours per week. After receiving training in ethnographic note-taking, they begin drafting fieldnotes based on their observations. Students are required to submit three sets of fieldnotes throughout the fieldwork period. To guide their writing, we recommend organizing notes into three parts: direct observations, reflexive commentary, and preliminary interpretations or analytical insights. Year after year, students discover that while fieldwork itself requires time and energy, writing comprehensive and thoughtful fieldnotes is by far the most labor-intensive and time-consuming part of the process.

Another key assignment is the development of an interview protocol. Students prepare a set of questions for a semi-structured interview, including follow-up or "probe" questions. They also include practical notes to themselves regarding self-presentation, informed consent, final wrap-up questions, and exit strategies. After conducting an interview, students submit a transcript along with a brief analytical memo.

By the end of the semester, students compile their fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and analytical memos into a final essay. In their essays, students often restate the research question, explain the methodological choices, summarize key findings, and reflect critically on the study's limitations. We encourage students to emphasize reflexivity and self-assessment as integral parts of the research process. In some cases, students write up the final essay in the format of a draft of a journal article.

Although field assignments are conducted individually, and each student is assigned to a peer group of three to four classmates. These groups serve as support networks, offering constructive feedback on interview protocols, fieldnotes, transcripts, and other materials throughout the semester. Participants regularly read and comment on each other's work, often initiating productive exchanges both in class and over email, independent of the instructor. While qualitative fieldwork is often a solitary endeavor, these peer groups help foster a collaborative environment and a shared sense of intellectual community (Ortega, Jensen, and Auyero 2024).

Examples of the Research Projects

Over the years that the course has been offered, students have completed a wide range of research projects in New Haven and nearby areas. There is a long-standing tradition of studying local politics in New Haven, with Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* (1961) being perhaps the most iconic example. Following this tradition, many students, especially those focused on American politics, choose to explore local institutions of governance. In particular, the New Haven Board of Alders (the city's elected legislative council) frequently attracts student interest. For instance, in Spring 2025, three students examined the Board from different perspectives, including public participation processes, the role of emotions, and its interactions with activist groups.

One student recently conducted an extensive ethnography of the immigration court in Hartford, Connecticut. Volunteering as a paralegal and court translator, interviewing lawyers and human rights activists, and observing court hearings and work in the legal aid centers, the student documented how bureaucratic delays, procedural confusion, and language barriers create what they call "civic suspension." Rather than resolving cases, the court traps immigrants in a prolonged legal limbo, forcing them to comply with legal procedures while withholding recognition and rights. The student was, using the bureaucratic language, an "undocumented immigrant" themselves, and they found the experience of the study to be deeply meaningful for their own activism. At the same time, they managed to keep a critical distance, which is necessary for sound scientific analysis.

Many students investigate local social movements, activist groups, and NGOs engaged in issues such as environmental protection, migrant rights, and domestic violence. One student, for example, studied how activism can be sustained across generations, looking at grassroots organizing around climate change. Importantly, participants do not limit their research to liberal or progressive causes. For example, one project examined individuals protesting outside Planned Parenthood clinics. Rather than assuming they constituted a cohesive protest group, the student questioned whether their actions qualified as collective activism and whether the term "protester" was even appropriate. Through observations and interviews, the study showed that although these individuals may appear unified, they are motivated by diverse beliefs, pursue differing goals, and often act independently. While some disagree openly, most remain disengaged from one another's strategies. Projects like this help students learn to engage with people whose views they may strongly oppose, which is an essential skill for political scientists. Developing empathy and reflecting on positionality are critical components of these research experiences.

Churches and synagogues have proven to be rich sites for exploring themes such as authority, community, and identity_particularly popular topics among students in political theory. For one project, a student embedded himself in a Baptist church to probe the links between contemporary theology and the history of political thought. Another student wrote about the links between the Hispanic community and a local Catholic Church.

Comparativists sometimes connect their regional research interests to local contexts by studying diasporas, ethnic associations, and even ethnic restaurants. New Haven, famous for its pizza and home to a notable Italian American heritage, has also been a site for exploring Central American, Chinese, South Asian, and Middle Eastern communities. Research focusing on the latter proved especially sensitive in Spring 2025, given the securitarian policies of the Trump administration. In that case, the student ultimately decided not to proceed, out of concern for increasing the visibility and stress on the community. At times, choosing not to conduct fieldwork is the most ethical and responsible decision.

Students have also found political angles on topics beyond the conventional scope of political science research. These include the role of race in drag queen performances, the ways in which community orchestras can build civic fabric, and the surprising role that libraries play as sites of both civic conflict and community-building.

During the COVID-19 restrictions on in-person research, we shifted the class's research component to digital ethnography. As Borges (2025) notes in this publication, digital ethnography is a valuable method in its own right and became indispensable during the pandemic. During those semesters, students were no longer confined to New Haven and undertook creative projects—such as studying online fan communities of Tamil film actors-turned-politicians, conservative social media discussions of the January 6th Capitol attack, and internal chats of an international charity group. While we continue to engage with digital ethnography in the seminar, we resumed in-person research as soon as conditions permitted, because the immersive experience of face-to-face fieldwork remains irreplaceable.

Some seminar participants developed their class projects into dissertations. One student studied organizing by undocumented residents of New Haven, a study that became the basis for a dissertation that included sites in other states as well. Another embarked on ethnographic research on how socially and economically marginalized families in New Haven navigate the challenges of their dependence on state bureaucracies for various kinds of services, which became the theme of his dissertation. Another drew on contacts within the Guatemalan diaspora in a nearby city to develop a dissertation about postwar violence in Guatemalan communities that drew on extensive field research there. Another analyzed the dilemmas and challenges faced by New Haven's community radio station, and then drew on that field work for intensive participant observation research with an indigenous community radio station in Central America. One dissertation on relations between African American churches and police departments grew out of an initial study in New Haven. Another—at the intersection of political theory and American politics— drew on initial field and archival research at New Haven schools and analyzed a period of teacher and parent control of a New Haven public high school as an instance of democratic schooling.

Concluding Thoughts

The existence of a dedicated qualitative fieldwork course is a distinctive strength of the Yale program. That it is embedded within a broader qualitative methods sequence makes it even more exceptional. According to course evaluations, even students who primarily use quantitative methods recognize the value of the class. While it is time-intensive and challenging to supervise 15–20 field projects simultaneously, it is a very fun class to teach. We ourselves learn a lot not only about ethical concerns, cutting-edge ethnographic work, and the challenges of research design but also about the politics of New Haven and the nearby region. We hope that other PhD-granting programs will consider developing similar courses and sequences in qualitative methods.

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Longform APSA Awards (2025)

Giovanni Sartori Book Award

Committee: Fiona Shen-Bayh (Chair) (University of Maryland), Tomila Lankina (London School of Economics), Iza Ding (Northwestern University)

Recipients: Erin Lin (Ohio State University)

Erin Lin. 2024. *When the Bombs Stopped*. Princeton University Press.

When the Bombs Stopped by Erin Lin examines the long-run legacies of political conflict on economic development, a topic that political scientists and development economists have scrutinized extensively, usually from a quantitative perspective. To these well-trodden debates, Lin offers a refreshingly different perspective—one that begins from the literal ground up. Focusing on the case of Cambodia, one of the targets of extensive US bombing during the Vietnam War, she examines the long-run impacts of aerial firepower on a range of political and economic outcomes. Her empirical inquiry is both quantitative and qualitative, including econometric analyses of fine-grained data as well as extensive fieldwork in villages that were once bombed.

This book is a masterclass in multi-method research. By traveling to literal fields of former conflict to understand the consequences of bombing decades after the fact, including areas still littered with undetonated land mines, Lin immerses the reader (and herself) in the communities that are usually studied only through statistics. While aggregate data remain valuable, and Lin incorporates these data at several points, her work underscores the need to scrutinize the lived experiences of post-conflict development, especially the unexpected trajectories that can emerge in the wake of violence.

Using a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods, Lin leverages ethnographic depth in combination with abstract empirical analysis, revealing causal mechanisms that connect historical violence with present-day outcomes. Her findings on the long-run consequences of bombs are especially revelatory. Large clusters of unexploded bombs tend to settle in the most fertile soil, holding farmers in otherwise ideal agricultural areas in a subsistence level trap. However, the risk of farming potentially explosive land offers an ironic insurance to these farmers, as the unexploded bombs make the land less valuable to the central government and to speculators, making it less likely that their land will be expropriated and developed by the state. This leads to a trade-off that represents one of the key insights of Lin's book: farmers can increase their economic security by clearing the bombs from their land yet doing so increases economic risk by making the land more desirable to others.

A final note on the readability of this book. Despite complicated subject matters, both substantively and methodologically, Lin's elegant prose carries the reader through the fields of rural Cambodia as well as the analytical debates of political economists. Her ethnographic narratives, which are peppered throughout the book, are particularly compelling, providing vivid snapshots of how humans can survive in areas that should be uninhabitable. It is a short book but an impactful one, providing much-needed bottom-up perspectives on conflicts that are often only studied from the top-down.

Honorable mention: Margaret L. Boittin (York University)

Margaret L. Boittin. 2024. *The Regulation of Prostitution in China: Law in the Everyday Lives of Sex Workers, Police Officers, and Public Health Officials.* Cambridge University Press.

The book, which studies how sex workers navigate their everyday life and work and the regulation of prostitution in China, is a masterclass in fieldwork and social-legal ethnography. The committee was unanimous in praising the book as a showcase of qualitative research on hard-to-reach communities of sex workers in China. The immersive fieldwork-based research touches upon political spheres at the intersection of society and the state in novel ways. Although dealing with a community on the margins of law and society, the book provides important insights into the day-to-day aspects of state-society relations, the law, and the subtle expressions of social resilience and resistance in an autocratic state. The book is fabulously well written— a genuine pleasure to read. Real-life stories provide the reader with memorable vignettes and insights into China's cultural mores and sensibilities surrounding family, marriage, infidelity, precarity, and social status, as well as how the social values are interlaced with political and legal frameworks governing sex work. This book is bound to be read widely across the disciplines and sub-fields of the social sciences, ranging from socio-legal studies and gender studies to political science and sociology.

David Collier Mid-Career Achievement Award

Committee: Nicholas Rush Smith (Chair) (City College of New York), Dan Slater (University of Michigan), Tasha Fairfield (London School of Economics)

Recipient: Amanda Robinson (Ohio State University)

The Qualitative and Mixed-Methods Research Section is pleased to present the 2025 David M. Collier Mid-Career Achievement Award to Amanda Robinson, Associate Professor of Political Science at The Ohio State University. Professor Robinson's nomination stands out for her exemplary record of institution-building, scholarship, service work, and teaching that bridges between the experimental methods with qualitative and multimethod communities.

The methodological bridge-building for which the committee is recognizing Prof. Robinson is immediately evidenced in her scholarship. Prof. Robinson's dissertation and book project, while in the causal inference tradition associated with experimental research, are based on 16 months of fieldwork in Malawi, fluency in Chichewa, and the methodological advantages that such linguistic fluency affords when crafting survey questions and experimental designs attuned to local conditions. Such deep engagement with the context, in the committee's view, enhances the quality of the inferences drawn from the experiments. Indeed, in the words of her nominator, Professor Robinson's book, *The Political Logic of Cultural Revival: Ethnic Visibility, Linked Fate, and Electoral Politics in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2024) is "a path-breaking study of the emergence of ethnic identity in Malawi," and "is precisely the sort of investigation that only serious qualitative research can produce."

The book asks how and under what conditions appeals to cultural solidarity gain traction in politically marginalized communities and why leaders would invest limited resources in such practices. Prof. Robinson's research shows that such practices can produce a sense of linked fate within a cultural group by stoking group-based pride and provide avenues for expressing that ethnic pride through explicit cultural instruction. She argues that given these two conditions, political elites invest in cultural revival when doing so will bear political returns via increased ethnic visibility. The arguments—based upon extensive fieldwork and experiments informed by the deep contextual knowledge—yield a set of robust arguments relevant to a wide range of settings beyond Malawi.

It is not only in her scholarship, though, particularly impressed the committee. Rather, Prof. Robinson has combined this insistence on the importance of deep contextual knowledge with the tools that enhance causal relevance in her institution-building and service work. In her role as an institution-builder, Prof. Robinson has served since 2017 as a co-leader of the Working Group on African Political Economy (WGAPE)—the premier network for studying political economy and causal inference on the continent. In

that role, Prof. Robinson has promoted qualitative and interdisciplinary scholarship, emphasizing the importance of integrating local-context expertise to strengthen experimental methods for causal inference. As her nominator noted, the discipline is often riven by methodological divisions and Professor Robinson has been a champion for those seeking to overcome them, as evidenced by her work with WGAPE.

Indeed, this demand to overcome traditional methodological divisions is further evidenced in major service roles Prof. Robinson has undertaken. For example, she is currently one of the co-editors of *African Affairs*, the leading area studies journal. Historically, the journal has distinguished itself because both its authors and editors have had deep expertise in the continent's politics. While the journal is open to all methodological approaches, it has served as a particularly important venue for publishing qualitative research on Africa and has consistently featured authors with deep expertise on the topics they address. Consequently, Prof. Robinson's selection as an editor signals her own deep knowledge of local contexts and her commitment to publishing thoughtful, serious, and rigorous work that is deeply rooted in case-level insight.

Prof. Robinson has also taken the lead in passing these traits on to future students through her training—a final trait that distinguished Prof. Robinson's nomination. Her nominator included two syllabi for courses led by Dr. Robinson—one for a Field Research Methods course taught at her home institution of The Ohio State University and one abroad in Malawi. Both syllabi stood out to the nominations committee for their impressive breadth, drawing on methodological writing from across disciplines, their impressive diversity in the methodological approaches represented, and their insistence upon ethical engagement with the people among whom one is studying. The range of interlocutors with whom students in Malawi were due to engage, for example, was particularly impressive, reflecting the course's co-teaching arrangement with local Malawian faculty to deepen students' knowledge and engagement with the country.

For all of these reasons—Prof. Robinson's institution-building, her insistence on bridging methodological divisions, her first-rate research, and her broader service and teaching work—the committee is pleased to award Professor Robinson the 2025 Collier Award.

Alexander L. George Article Award

Committee: Nicholas Barnes (University of St. Andrews), Mai Hassan (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Jeb Barnes (University of Southern California)

Recipient: Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos (University of Oxford) and Juan Masullo (University of Milan). 2024. "Aligning Interviews with Process Tracing." *Sociological Methods & Research*

Hypothesis testing, process tracing, and interviews are essential components of the qualitative methods tool kit. In this article, the authors systematically consider strategies for designing research that combines these methods, explaining how to sample, design, and sequence interviews to yield insights for process-tracing. The resulting analysis provides a treasure trove of methodological insights and practical guidance for researchers using these tools and seeking to combine them. As such, this article contributes to the growing body of work in the field that seeks to go beyond a general defense of qualitative methods towards the rigorous application and systematic improvement of these methods.

Honorable Mention: Kurt Weyland (University of Texas, Austin). 2024. "Concept Misformation in an Age of Democratic Anxiety: Recent Temptations and Their Downsides." *World Politics* 76, no. 3 (July): 594-637.

This article provides a fascinating account of the social psychological drivers of concept stretching in the form of conflating classical and radial categories. It applies these insights to the growing literature on coups and fascism, providing timely warnings to scholars tempted to use dramatic terms in the face of growing threats to democracy.

Kendra Koivu Paper Award

Committee: Jasmine English (Stanford University), Consuelo Amat (Johns Hopkins University), Kevin Mazur (King's College London)

Recipient: Ronay Bakan (European University Institute). "Counterinsurgent Urbanism: Conflict in Ruins of a UNESCO World Heritage Site."

The Kendra Koivu Award recognizes exceptional qualitative and multi-method research that honors the scholarly legacy of Kendra Koivu. This year, the award goes to Ronay Bakan (EUI) for her remarkable paper, "Counterinsurgent Urbanism: Conflict in Ruins of a UNESCO World Heritage Site."

Bakan's work reframes how we think about civil war and counterinsurgency. Through the concept of *counterinsurgent urbanism,* Bakan shows how states weaponize heritage preservation and urban development as tools of counterinsurgency, simultaneously destroying the environments that support existing insurgencies while constructing conditions that prevent future insurgencies. Grounded in meticulous ethnographic fieldwork in Turkey's Kurdish region, the paper reveals the everyday, often overlooked forms of violence embedded in planning decisions, restoration projects, and heritage-making efforts.

Methodologically, the paper is a model of creativity, innovation, and rigor. First, Bakan pioneers the innovative approach of treating heritage as data. By centering heritage-making efforts, archaeological excavations, restoration projects, and cultural festivals as sources of evidence, Bakan demonstrates how researchers can access the politics of state violence without directly engaging topics that might endanger both researchers and interlocutors. Second, the paper expertly exemplifies a spatial approach to the study of conflict: moving beyond event-centric approaches to civil war, Bakan demonstrates how ethnographic attention to space and place reveals the "heterotemporally layered" nature of conflict. Third, Bakan elegantly demonstrates a multi-scalar analysis by tracing connections between local, national, and international actors in heritage governance. Finally, the paper effectively illustrates iterative theory development: using Suriçi as an analytical site for theory development, Bakan generates novel conceptual tools for understanding state violence

In so doing, "Counterinsurgent Urbanism" shows what qualitative research makes possible: the paper pushes conceptual boundaries, expands methodological repertoires, and reveals dynamics of political violence that would otherwise remain hidden. The committee is thrilled to recognize Ronay Bakan with the 2025 Kendra Koivu Award.

Honorable Mention: Ulaş Erdoğdu (Northwestern), "Nearly Realized Cases: A Novel Framework to Select Negative Cases for Comparative Theory Development"

The committee also awarded an honorable mention to Ulaş Erdoğdu (Northwestern), for his paper, "Nearly Realized Cases: A Novel Framework to Select Negative Cases for Comparative Theory Development."

Erdoğdu tackles a foundational problem in comparative research: how to systematically select negative cases when studying rare, politically significant events—civil wars, revolutions, coups, or democratic breakdowns. To address this challenge, Erdoğdu develops the concept of "nearly realized" cases: negative cases that exhibit positive values on all but one of the constitutive dimensions of the outcome of interest. By formalizing what many scholars do informally, Erdoğdu's framework promises to enhance the rigor and transparency of case selection in comparative research.

The committee was particularly impressed with the paper's clarity and utility. By successfully bridging methodological theory and practice, Erdoğdu provides scholars with a framework that is both conceptually sophisticated and practically implementable. The result raises the bar for rigor and transparency within case selection in comparative politics. We congratulate Erdoğdu on this important achievement.

Politics of Marginalization and Inclusion Award

Committee: Dipali Mukopadhayay (Johns Hopkins University), Rana Khoury (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign), Wendy Pearlman (Northwestern University)

Co-Recipient: Erin Lin (Ohio State University)

Erin Lin. 2024. *When the Bombs Stopped*. Princeton University Press.

How do developing countries recover from war, particularly when those countries have been on the receiving end of the massive firepower of the United States? In *When the Bombs Stopped*, Erin Lin examines rural economic development in Cambodia to understand and explain how legacies of violence affect communities in the long run. In the soils of small farms, Lin delicately uncovers an explosive paradox: undetonated bombs remain embedded in the softest, most fertile land—rendering it unusable. Pervasive fear in what would otherwise be the most productive farming communities stalls economic development. Lin's thoughtful ethnographic immersion in rural Cambodia enabled these important insights. The stories she tells of individual families both humanize and illustrate the qualitative analysis, which gains comparative leverage through statistical analyses of an original dataset of US Air Force ordnance and various indicators of economic development. Lin's book is both an exemplar of qualitative and multimethod research and of scholarship that focuses on the historic and ongoing impacts of discrimination and exclusion, as well as the struggles for inclusion in society.

Co-Recipient: Nirvikar Jassal (London School of Economics)

Nirvikar Jassal. 2024. "Does Victim Gender Matter for Justice Delivery? Police and Judicial Responses to Women's Cases in India." *American Political Science Review* 118, no 3 (August): 1278-1304.

How do Indian women who are victims of violence experience and engage with the justice system in the face of unyielding discrimination? This question lies at the heart of Nirvikar Jassal's ambitious multi-method article. Through a remarkable data collection effort and impressive methodological innovation, Jassal employs machine learning to engage with an enormous volume of text, deploying this technology in the service of a mode of qualitative analysis otherwise impossible to pursue. Importantly, his approach centers the voices of women who experienced violence at the very margins of society in terms that complicate—and then deepen—our understanding of how the Indian criminal justice system operates and, more generally, how inequity can emerge, compound, and persist in state-society relations. The article enables the reader to move through these women's encounters with a particular face of the Indian state, step by step, so as to understand discrimination as it manifests and accumulates across a range of moments and forms. The amalgamated portrait of their and their families' experiences, as narrated in their own words, serves as a meaningful indictment of Indian police and courts. It can also serve, in Jassal's own telling, as a rich basis for further scholarly inquiry and novel efforts at reform.

Qualitative Evidence Award

Committee: Killian Clarke (Georgetown University), Callan Hummel (University of British Columbia), Janice Gallagher (Rutgers University)

Recipient: Apekshya Prasai (Brown University)

Apekshya Prasai. "Gendered Processes of Rebellion: Understanding Strategies for Organizing Violence" (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Apekshya Prasai's dissertation, "Gendered Processes of Rebellion: Understanding Strategies for Organizing Violence," is a tour-de-force of qualitative research. Prasai conducted 16 months of fieldwork in the challenging context of post-conflict Nepal, gaining access to both leaders and rank-and-file members of the Maoist rebel group. Through this immersive fieldwork Prasai generated

an impressive range of qualitative evidence, which she then deployed to develop a novel and innovative concept—rebel gender strategies. She also draws on these data to elaborate a new theory of rebel gender strategies, arguing that rebel groups tend to expand women's roles and adopt more subversive gender strategies only when pressured to do so by well-organized networks of women activists. Unlike existing arguments about the determinants of gender strategies, Prasai's argument crucially centers the agency of women activists themselves.

The committee was particularly impressed with the range, rigor, and creativity of the qualitative data collected for this project. In Nepal, Prasai conducted 186 semi-structured interviews with a wide array of rebel and non-rebel interlocutors. The committee was especially struck by the number of non-elite women included in this sample, as these individuals were both difficult to reach and crucial for answering the research question. Beyond the interviews, Prasai engaged in other forms of immersive fieldwork and participant observation: she spent time in party offices, attended the memorial service for a rebel leader's mother, joined an ideological training event, and went along with election canvassers. Moreover, in the absence of an official archive on the rebel movement, she compiled a range of creative and original documentary source material from rebels' private collections, including memoirs, diaries, letters, memorabilia, training manuals, and photos.

Prasai's dissertation also considers issues of generalization and external validity, and she gathers further qualitative evidence to show that her argument extends to other insurgencies. She compares Nepal's Maoist movement to the Naxalite insurgency in India and also conducts a medium-N analysis of other leftist insurgencies across South Asia. For this, she conducted two months of in-person archival research in the Netherlands, where she uncovered a unique collection of oral histories with 40 Naxalite members. Through these, and other archival documents and oral histories, she demonstrates that her work presents a truly general theory of rebel-gender strategies.

In short, Prasai's dissertation is a very deserving winner of QMMR's inaugural qualitative evidence award.

Honorable mention: Isabel Laterzo-Tingley (University of Texas, Austin), "Political Positions on Public Security"

Drawing on over seven months of fieldwork and more than 100 interviews, Laterzo-Tingley masterfully integrates rich qualitative data with a quantitative text-as-data analysis of over 500 gubernatorial campaign platforms in Brazil. The study challenges the binary between punitive and preventive public security policies by describing and analyzing an array of overlapping policy portfolios. It documents significant variation within ideological groups and shows that voters interpret and respond to similar policy portfolios differently depending on the candidate's ideology. Left-leaning candidates are afforded more flexibility, while right-leaning candidates are penalized for integrated approaches. This compelling and original research both refines our understanding of public security debates and advances methodological best practices by using qualitative data to inform and improve quantitative models.

2025

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